

## The Turn of the Soul

# Intersections

## Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture

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VOLUME 23 – 2012

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# The Turn of the Soul

Representations of Religious Conversion  
in Early Modern Art and Literature

*Edited by*

Lieke Stelling  
Harald Hendrix  
Todd M. Richardson



BRILL

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2012

Cover illustration: Michelangelo Buonarroti, *The Conversion of Saul* (ca. 1542–1545), (detail). Fresco, Cappella Paolina, Vatican Palace, Vatican City. Image © Scala / Art Resource, New York.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The turn of the soul : representations of religious conversion in early modern art and literature / edited by Lieke Stelling, Harald Hendrix, Todd M. Richardson.

p. cm. — (Intersections ; 23)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-90-04-21856-7 (hardback : acid-free paper) 1. Conversion in literature.

2. Conversion in art. 3. Literature, European—Early modern, 1500–1700—History and criticism. I. Stelling, Lieke. II. Hendrix, Harald. III. Richardson, Todd M.

PN49.T74 2012

809'.933824824—dc23

2011044848

ISSN 1568-1811

ISBN 978 90 04 21856 7 (hardback)

ISBN 978 90 04 22637 1 (e-book)

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## INTRODUCTION

Lieke Stelling and Todd M. Richardson

The religious upheavals of the early modern period and the fierce debate they unleashed about true devotion gave conversion an unprecedented urgency. Whereas artists and authors had always been inspired by it, literary, artistic and technical developments in the Renaissance incited them to capture, represent and communicate the elusive concept of religious transformation in new ways. Never before did the practice of conversion appear in so many guises; indeed, never before were there so many doctrines and forms of piety to embrace or forswear. Prior to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, moreover, religious conversion had not been as intermingled with secular issues, such as politics, nationality and commerce, as it was in Renaissance Europe. There are three developments in particular that fostered the renewed interest in pious renewal or the exchange of religions: the Protestant and Catholic Reformations, Western European colonial enterprises in the Americas, Africa and Asia, and Ottoman colonial expansion.

During the Reformation, new models of devotion to reach conversion were introduced that challenged traditional ideas of spiritual reform. Stressing humanity's complete dependence on God's grace, Luther and Calvin considered conversion first and foremost a divine intervention naturally flowing from God's righteousness and manifesting itself in repentance. Indeed, Calvin, in his *Institutes*, claimed that 'the whole of conversion to God is understood under the term 'repentance', and faith is not the least part of conversion'.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the Reformation also opened up a range of new possibilities for changing one's denominational identity. 'Conversion' now also implied the shift from one Christian fold to another form of Christianity. As such, conversion came to play a significant role within religious polemics,

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in McKim D.K., "The Mainline Protestant Understanding of Conversion" in Malony H.N. – Southard S. (eds.), *Handbook of Religious Conversion* (Birmingham, AL: 1992), 123–136, 129. See for an extensive discussion of Luther's understanding of conversion, Harran M.J., *Luther on Conversion: The Early Years* (Ithaca – London: 1983).

and was more than ever a political statement. The Christianization of Jews, too, was an issue within these debates. From around the end of the sixteenth century a belief developed that the conversion of the Jews would herald the Apocalypse.<sup>2</sup> Many Reformers, including Luther, believed that the Jews' adoption of Christianity 'had awaited the preaching of the true Gospel'.<sup>3</sup> Thus the conversion of the Jews, foreshadowed by Christianizations of individual Jews, served as a powerful argument in defence of Protestantism. Rome, in turn, responded to these ideas by forcing Jews to attend conversion sermons, hoping they would turn Catholic.

The European colonial expansion into Africa, Asia and the New World created an industry for the training of missionaries, with a central focus on methods of conversion. For Peter Martyr, the chronicler of the Spanish explorations in central and Latin America, proselytizing was the first objective that sprang to mind when he realised that indigenous peoples were, as Stephen Greenblatt puts it, 'a tabula rasa ready to take the imprint of European civilization'.<sup>4</sup> Martyr notes:

for lyke as rased or vnpaynted tables, are apte to receaue what formes soo euer are fyrst drawen theron by the hande of the paynter, euen soo these naked and simple people, doo soone receaue the customes of owre Religion, and by conuersation with owre men, shake of theyr fierce and natie barbarousnes.<sup>5</sup>

English colonists were no less zealous in their missionary ambitions. The Virginia settlers deployed various strategies to convince the Indians of the Protestant truth. The Virginia Company went as far as to instruct its Governor to take away or even execute the Indians' 'inio-casockes or Priestes'.<sup>6</sup> Yet most conversion attempts were directed at children who had to be 'procured and instructed in the English language and manner'.<sup>7</sup> The asymmetrical power relations between colonizer and colonized, however, often proved an obstacle to successful

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<sup>2</sup> Shapiro J., *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: 1996) 132.

<sup>3</sup> Rowan S., "Luther, Bucer and Eck on the Jews", *Sixteenth Century Journal* 16 (1985) 79–90, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Greenblatt S., *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York: 1992) 17.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse* 17.

<sup>6</sup> Bach R.A., *Colonial Transformations: The Cultural Production of the New Atlantic World, 1580–1640* (New York: 2000) 15.

<sup>7</sup> Robinson W.S., "Indian Education and Missions in Colonial Virginia", *The Journal of Southern History* 18,2 (1952) 152–168, 153–154.

proselytizing. For instance, in 1622 disturbed trade relationships between the native inhabitants and the English residents in Jamestown resulted in the killing of a quarter of the English inhabitants, which temporarily ended conversion efforts.

Scholars have pointed out that while many European seafaring nations were busy exploring and conquering indigenous territories in the New World, they simultaneously felt the threat of being colonized by the expanding Ottoman sultanate.<sup>8</sup> This was the largest Islamic territory of early modern Europe, which, during its peak in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, stretched from the coast of northern Africa to Iraq and western Iran and from modern Turkey to south-east Europe. The Western European anxieties about Ottoman expansion were not unsubstantiated, if only because Islamic military forces managed to capture Christians in their European homelands. Yet European Christians were vexed more by the perceived vast number of voluntary conversions to Islam than by their enslaved compatriots who defected from their faith. Having turned pirate, many impoverished Christians came in contact with the Ottomans when they called in at Turkish ports or other cosmopolitan cities like Venice. In these places they managed to improve their worldly prospects significantly by striking deals with the Ottomans and ‘turning Turk’. This is not surprising if we realise that the make-up of the Ottoman society allowed for social, political and economic mobility to a much greater extent than European societies at the time.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, ‘[t]he Ottoman Empire was a lavish provider of booty for daring and resourceful employees. This attractive power was recognized and understood by European contemporaries’.<sup>10</sup> Renegades were able to join the army and even occupy important positions in administration.<sup>11</sup> In 1606, a Turkish army officer proudly noted that he had command of 30,000 Christians who ‘are the founders of our artillerie, and other Instruments of warre’ and who are all

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<sup>8</sup> Vitkus D., “Turning Turk in *Othello*: The Conversion and Damnation of the Moor”, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48 (1997) 145–176, 146. Matar N., *Turks Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: 1999) 8–11.

<sup>9</sup> Coles P., *The Ottoman Impact on Europe* (London: 1968) 154.

<sup>10</sup> Coles, *The Ottoman Impact on Europe* 154.

<sup>11</sup> Potter L. “Pirates and ‘Turning Turk’ in Renaissance Drama” in Maquerlot J.P. – Willems M. (eds.), *Travel and Drama in Shakespeare’s Time* (Cambridge: 1996) 124–140, 129.

‘Renegados’ battling ‘in defence of our lawe, and with vs to conquer your country’.<sup>12</sup>

It is not without irony that what the Western Christian tradition has deemed the prime examples of religious conversion, those of Paul of Tarsus and Augustine of Hippo, are also the most elusive and complex. This is partly due to the fact that not only is Augustine’s regeneration inconceivable without Paul’s, but the Christian conception of Paul’s conversion is also determined by Augustine’s reading of it. At the same time, both changes of heart as well as their reciprocity allow us to gain insight into the wide array of meanings and forms of divine experience that are indicated by the term ‘conversion’.

Paul only very briefly touches on his spiritual transformation in his *Epistles*. He describes it as a divine call inciting him to turn from his zealous persecution of the followers of Christ and to spread Jesus’ gospel. Paul did not use a phrase that directly translates as ‘religious conversion’ when he referred to his experience, which can partly be explained by the fact that ‘conversion’ is hardly a biblical term. As Frederick Gaiser reminds us, ‘readers of the English version of the Bible will run across terms like “conversion” or “convert(s)” or “to convert” only rarely [...]. Yet definitions abound, and the phenomenon – the unconditional turning of the human toward God – is seen as fundamental to biblical religion’.<sup>13</sup> Many of these definitions relate to the concept of repentance, a word that does occur regularly in Scripture. Three terms in the Old and New Testament that are often understood as conversion are the Hebrew word *shubh* and the Greek *epistrefein* and *metanoein*. *Shubh* literally means ‘return’, but is often explained as ‘repent’, for example in Jeremiah 3:14

Turn [*shubh*], O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion.

*Metanoein* is most often used to indicate the verb to repent, *epistrefein* to the act of turning oneself to a person or God. Examples of both terms can be found in Acts 26: 20, which describes Paul’s efforts at converting the Gentiles after his own spiritual transformation:

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Matar N., “The Renegade in English Seventeenth-Century Imagination”, *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 33 (1993) 489–505, 490.

<sup>13</sup> Gaiser F.J., “A Biblical Theology of Conversion,” in Malony H.N. – Southard S. (eds.), *Handbook of Religious Conversion* 93–107, 93.

But [he] shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent [*metanoein*] and turn to [*epistrefein*] God, and do works meet for repentance [*metanoias*].

Paula Fredriksen alerts us to the fact that Paul's conversion occurred in 34 A.D., so soon after the crucifixion that, instead of taking on a 'Christian' belief, Paul's new faith can be better understood in the context of a 'Jesus movement' consisting of Jewish adherers.<sup>14</sup> Paul's conversion has nevertheless come to be known as the legendary transformation of a violent persecutor of Christians, a man who exchanged Judaism for the Christian religion: the first 'interfaith' conversion to Christianity. The reason for this, Fredriksen argues, must be sought in Acts, written by Luke, as well as in Augustine. Luke's description, as opposed to Paul's, gives the impression that the latter indeed converted from Judaism to Christianity. This is due to the 'theme [...] of constant and terrible Jewish hostility to Christianity' in the Luke text, which is 'crucial to his concept of Paul's conversion and already important in his Gospel'.<sup>15</sup> Augustine played a vital role in disseminating the interpretation of Paul's divine experience as an interfaith conversion. Augustine, who presents his own conversion narrative in the *Confessions*, as well as in the *Cassiciacum* dialogues and the anti-Pelagian writings, heavily relied on Luke's account of Paul. As Fredriksen notes,

through Luke and the Pastorals, Augustine can appropriate Paul, his prototype of the sinner saved despite himself because God so willed [...]. The New Testament canon thus serves as a sort of chamber for this mythic feed-back system, where Augustine the convert interprets Paul's conversion through his own, and his own through what he sees as Paul's. Taking his cue from Luke, Augustine holds Paul's conversion as the hermeneutic key to Pauline theology – identical, for him, with Catholic tradition.<sup>16</sup>

Augustine's conversion as he famously describes it in Book 8 of the *Confessions* is possibly open to even more interpretations than Paul's. His change of heart is summed up in an ostensibly simple story of a child chanting the words 'pick up and read', which Augustine interprets as a divine command. Upon reading Paul's Epistle to the Romans 13: 13–14

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<sup>14</sup> Fredriksen P., "Paul and Augustine: Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions and the Retrospective Self", *Journal of Theological Studies* 37,1 (1986) 3–34, 9.

<sup>15</sup> Fredriksen, "Paul and Augustine" 9.

<sup>16</sup> Fredriksen, "Paul and Augustine" 27.

all his uncertainties are resolved: 'Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts'. This seemingly sudden conversion has nevertheless also been interpreted as an extended process of lifelong spiritual progress, whose description covers the entire *Confessions*. Moreover, if Augustine's conversion is a highly individual and private experience, it is also an event that conditions and is conditioned by the conversions of others. That is to say, in the *Confessions* Augustine underlines the significance of the conversion narrative as an *exemplum* by embedding his account of his divine experience in the garden in a *mise en abyme* of comparable and related conversion stories. This emphasis on the imitative aspect of conversion eventually directs the reader towards Augustine's ultimate example, Christ. As José Oroz Reta argues, 'Augustinian conversion is not produced through philosophical reflection but rather through the imitation of the humble Christ in whom is fulfilled the most sublime aspiration of ancient man: union with God'.<sup>17</sup> Augustine's turn to God involves a Pauline rejection of worldly pleasure: 'The effect of your converting me to yourself was that I did not now seek a wife and had no ambition for success in this world'.<sup>18</sup> Augustine's spiritual writings became the foundation of the Augustinian order, which additionally points to the dominant medieval meaning of conversion, the adoption of a monastic life. Yet Augustine's spiritual transformation was also his third interfaith conversion. Having lived as a Manichean and having pursued the life of a Neoplatonist, he became a member of the Christian Church on Easter, 387, eight months after his divine experience in the Milanese garden. Perhaps most disturbingly, Augustine's writings predating and postdating his legendary turn do not manifest a radical change of conviction. What has come to be known as 'the Christian paradigm of right-angled change into something radically new',<sup>19</sup> can also be understood as a mere moment within 'a fundamental continuity in Augustine's thought from the very beginning'.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Oroz Reta J. "Conversion" (trans. A. Esposito, ed. and rev. A. Fitzgerald) in Fitzgerald A. (ed.), *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1999) 239–242, 241.

<sup>18</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, H. Chadwick (trans. and ed.), (Oxford: 1998) 153–154.

<sup>19</sup> Abrams M.H., *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: 1971) 113.

<sup>20</sup> Harrison C., *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity* (Oxford: 2006) 7.

In addition to the question of the process and character of the conversion experience, fundamental to the narratives of both Paul and Augustine is the tenuous relationship between seeing and blindness, vision and understanding, sight and insight. According to Scripture, when Paul's eyes were opened (spiritually), he could see nothing (physically), and he remained blind for three days. Augustine's account deals with vision in a similarly paradoxical way:

I entered and with my soul's eye, such as it was, saw above that same eye of my soul the immutable light higher than my mind – not the light of every day, obvious to anyone, nor a larger version of the same kind which would, as it were, have given out a much brighter light and filled everything with its magnitude. It was not that light, but a different thing, utterly different from all our kinds of light. [...] When I first came to know you, you raised me up to make me see that what I saw is Being, and that I who saw am not yet Being. And you gave a shock to the weakness of my sight by the strong radiance of your rays, and I trembled with love and awe.<sup>21</sup>

These types of visual metaphors dominate Augustine's account of his spiritual enlightenment: he sees the immutable light with the eyes of his soul, does not derive this vision from the body, and arrives at 'that which is' with the flash of a 'trembling glance'. Later in book seven, Augustine revisits the topic: '“you shut my eyes that they should not see vanity” (Ps. 118: 37). [...] I woke up in you and saw you to be infinite in another sense, and this way of seeing you did not come from the flesh'.<sup>22</sup>

The influence of Paul's conversion experience does not stop with Augustine. Augustine's interpretation and imitation of Paul's account creates a conversion type that is further emulated by Christians for centuries to come, particularly as it relates to the issue of vision. Just one, more popular example is Francis Petrarch. In the first letter of the fourth book of his *Le Familiari*, Petrarch recounts his ascent of the highest peak in Provence, Mont Ventoux.<sup>23</sup> This famous letter indicates the shades of grey between autobiographical and artistic appropriation of Augustine's conversion narrative. When in the 1950s and

<sup>21</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* 123.

<sup>22</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* 126.

<sup>23</sup> See *Petrarca: Le Familiari*, in Rossi V. – Bosco U. (Florence: 1933–1942) 4 vols. For English translations, see Bishop M., *Petrarch and His World* (Bloomington: 1963) 104–109.

60s it was discovered that the letter was actually composed around twenty years later than Petrarch had claimed, the 'conversion' as narrated in his letter came to be the subject of an extensive and ongoing scholarly debate about its existential, artistic and biographical value. Although the veracity of the account may be questionable, the letter nevertheless offers insight into how Petrarch may have retrospectively conceptualised the mental processes of conversion.

The letter is addressed to Petrarch's confessor, the Augustinian friar Dionigi da Borgo San Sepolcro, and dated at 1336 by the author. Moments of meditation on his moral shortcomings are interspersed throughout his meandering journey to the top. Particularly interesting are his discussion of the physical characteristics of the landscape, including the pathways he chooses to travel, the allegorical function they assume, and the commentary they offer on his spiritual enlightenment.

Petrarch explains that while his brother chose a direct path straight up the ridge, out of weakness he took an easier one, which actually descended. Because of his laziness, when his brother had already ascended a considerable distance, he was still wandering in the valley. Finally, he became disgusted and resolved to climb immediately. However, after he reached his brother and they had walked for a while, he forgot his earlier troubles and decided to once again take a lower road. He wandered the roundabout path through winding valleys, only to find himself soon in his old difficulty. As Petrarch explains, 'I was simply trying to avoid the exertion of the ascent'.<sup>24</sup> Despite his best efforts, he made this same mistake three times or more during a few hours.

The frustration that results from Petrarch's struggle between taking the difficult, narrow paths or the broad, easy ones leads him to sit down in a valley and transfer his thoughts from the physical to the spiritual world, addressing himself as follows:

What thou hast repeatedly experienced today in the ascent of this mountain, happens to thee, as to many, in the journey toward the blessed life. But this is not so readily perceived by men, since the motions of the body are obvious and external while those of the soul are invisible and hidden. Yes, the life which we call blessed is to be sought for on a high eminence, and strait is the way that leads to it. What, then, doth hold thee back? Nothing, assuredly, except that thou wouldst take a path which seems, at

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<sup>24</sup> Francis Petrarch, *Francesco Petrarca: The First Modern Scholar and Man of Letters*, ed. and trans. J.H. Robinson (New York: 1898) 312.



first thought, more easy, leading through low and worldly pleasures. But nevertheless in the end, after long wanderings, thou must perforce either climb the steeper path, under the burden of tasks foolishly deferred, to its blessed culmination, or lie down in the valley of thy sins.<sup>25</sup>

In the next section of his inner monologue, it becomes clear that, for Petrarch, the easy and difficult paths – the former bound to earthly desires, the latter to spiritual enlightenment – are defined by that which is visible versus that which is not.

While I was thus dividing my thoughts [...] to higher planes, it occurred to me to look into my copy of St. Augustine's *Confessions*. Where I first fixed my eyes it was written: 'And men go about to wonder at the heights of the mountains, and the mighty waves of the sea, and the wide sweep of rivers, and the circuit of the ocean, and the revolution of the stars, but themselves they consider not'. I was abashed and [...] I closed the book, angry with myself that I should still be admiring earthly things who might long ago have learned from even the pagan philosophers that nothing is wonderful but the soul, which, when great itself, finds nothing great outside itself. Then, in truth, I was satisfied that I had seen enough of the mountain; I turned my inward eye upon myself, and from that time not a syllable fell from my lips until we reached the bottom again.<sup>26</sup>

Petrarch is certain that the words of Augustine were intended for him only and goes on to note that Augustine and the hermit Anthony (whom Augustine in the *Confessions* quotes as an example of conversion) had had the same experience when they were confronted with a random Bible passage. Petrarch's experiences on the mountain, both his personal failings in discerning the way up and the physical characteristics of the landscape itself, lead him to renounce outward vision and the external beauty of a vista and turn his inner eye toward that which even the pagans believed to be wonderful – the soul. It is self-inflicted blindness that leads to his abrupt change in direction and spiritual revelation. Similar to Augustine's account in multiple ways, Petrarch's conversion also involves a Pauline rejection of worldly pleasure.

The accounts of Paul, Augustine, and Petrarch are illustrative of the fact that religious conversion is necessarily an imaginative construct with a wide range of forms. This is not to say that there is no such thing

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<sup>25</sup> Petrarch, *Francesco Petrarca* 312.

<sup>26</sup> Petrarch, *Francesco Petrarca* 316–317.

as a genuine experience of a turn of the soul, but that there are simply no objective criteria for establishing a definition of conversion. To put it simply, a conversion is a conversion whenever it is designated as such. Nevertheless, a conversion can at the same time be construed in a wide variety of often opposing ways, as testified by the hermeneutics and appropriations of 'Pauline' and 'Augustinian' conversion.

It is precisely these ideas of constructedness and poly-interpretability that inform the key themes of conversion in the present volume: (i) Agency, (ii) Authenticity and (iii) Imitation. Its investigation centres on the way in which spiritual transformations and exchanges of religions were constructed by their representations. Conversion could be expressed in a range of (metaphoric) binary oppositions, including vision versus blindness, ignorance versus wisdom and sinfulness versus holiness. Without the pressure of having to provide unambiguous, doctrinal answers, which characterize religious treatises or sermons, and with their rich variety of emotive, aesthetic and rhetorical means of expression, literature and the visual arts proved particularly well-adapted means to address, explore and represent the complex nature of conversion. At the same time, many artists and authors experimented with the notion that the expressive character of their work could cultivate a sensory experience for the viewer that enacted conversion. Indeed, focusing on conversion as one of early modern Europe's most pressing religious issues, this volume demonstrates that conversion cannot be separated from the creative and spiritual ways in which it was received.

The constructedness of conversion manifests itself in three questions that immediately arise from the lack of objective criteria: How is conversion authenticated? Where exactly is agency located in conversion? And what role does the genre of the conversion narrative, as represented in the examples of Paul, Augustine, and Petrarch, play in subsequent representations of religious transformation, whether in text or image? In fact, these were three aspects of conversion addressed by early modern authors and artists alike. Regarding the first issue, Protestant reformers questioned the active role of humankind in the process of conversion. Ascribing it fully to God's grace, they urged laity and clergy alike to reconsider drastically the human factors that had traditionally been seen as vehicles of conversion, such as the manner and form in which Scripture ought to be read, charity, mass, sermons as well as images and (morality or mystical) plays. Catholic reformers,

in turn, responded to Protestant successes with unprecedented missionary zeal on a global scale. Indeed, unequalled proselytism on both sides of the confessional divide, as well as an unprecedented range of denominations and religions to convert to and from, significantly increased the numbers of conversions and converts. Yet, as is suggested by the theme of authentication, many conversions were looked upon with suspicion, asking for unequivocal authentications of their genuineness. The motivations of Christians who embraced Islam were assumed to be opportunistic, but non-Christians turning Christian also had trouble integrating into Christian society. For many reasons, Jews who had adopted Christianity had great difficulty in being fully accepted as Christians. Moreover, the fact that many Christians who defected to another confession returned to their old persuasion, sometimes even to convert again, fostered the image of the convert as an opportunistic and unreliable vacillator. Finally, no matter the region or religion, institutions offered up diverse characters, saints and spiritual leaders in both text and image as examples for people to embrace. This was especially the case in the context of religious conversion, as narratives were canonized by religious institutions as models to imitate. What role does imitation play in helping to bring about spiritual revelation? More specifically, imitation inevitably takes place as a result of the practices of reading, viewing or performing; how, then, are these acts described or portrayed as devotional mechanisms that factor into the conversion experience?

These questions and contextual circumstances have informed our approach to thematically organizing the essays that follow. Rather than divide the contributions by religion, medium of representation, or geographical region, we have arranged them within categories that relate to these deeper issues: authenticity, agency and imitation.

Mathilde Bernard's essay analyses the *Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* by Agrippa d'Aubigné, which addresses the authenticity of Nicolas Harlay de Sancy's conversion to Catholicism under Henry IV. In his book, Aubigné creates a fiction around the confession of Sancy, where the latter provides justification for his conversion. Through the use of biting irony, however, Sancy's conversion and his justification for it are rendered meaningless by turning the genre of the 'confession' into a parody. Bernard goes on to examine how irony functions in the text, and to what extent it participates in constructing representations of the apostate at the turn of the century.

Christian II of Denmark became an early convert to Lutheranism in 1524. In 1530, he converted back to Catholicism, and attempted to reconquer his old kingdom in an unfortunate military expedition. Making use of the rich diplomatic material on the subject, Federico Zuliani introduces Christian, including his life and his religious experience, and analyses the particularities of his conversion as witnessed by the diplomatic sources – and especially the fact that few believed its sincerity.

Lieke Stelling examines the ways in which early modern English playwrights lost interest in the theme of spiritual conversions that were defined by their authenticity and started, instead, to focus on what she calls ‘interfaith conversion’, the exchange of religious identities. Although conversions from Judaism, Islam or Paganism to Christianity were also staged as genuine transformations, the fact that they were associated with death and marriage as symbols of irreversibility must be seen as a strategy to assuage fears over the reliability and steadfastness of converts and the stability of Christian identity that were inspired by these Christianizations.

In the early modern era, Christian and Islamic spheres overlapped, coincided, and were delineated by changing and permeable boundaries, so that the notion of separate ‘East’ and ‘West’ worlds is inaccurate and potentially misleading. With reference to early modern exchanges between Christianity and Islam, the idea of ‘turning Turk’ has become a focal point for scholars interested in Christian-Muslim relationships. Chloë Houston’s essay, however, takes a close look at the prospect of one instance of Muslim to Christian conversion, the rumoured conversion of the Safavid Shah ‘Abbās I (r. 1587–1629 CE). Houston argues that while representations of Islamic to Christian conversion reflected European attitudes to Islam, they were also bound up with contemporary divisions within the Christian church. Although in this case, actual conversion never took place – ‘Abbās remained a Muslim, and his change of religion was nothing more than conjecture – close consideration of actual or rumoured religious conversions may contribute to the scholarly efforts to focus on specific historical moments in the relations between Muslims and Christians.

In the final essay dealing with the issue of authenticity, Natalie Rothman addresses the presumed relationship between confessional identity and juridical subjecthood in early modern Venetian narratives of conversion from Islam to Christianity and from Christianity to

Islam (and to a lesser extent, conversion to Catholicism from Judaism and Protestantism). She examines several sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts, including reports penned by Venetian diplomats in Istanbul about renegades who had ‘turned Turk’, inquisitorial depositions by Muslim and Protestant subjects who sought reconciliation with the Church, and converts’ baptismal records and matrimonial examinations. She suggests how the process of conversion and the converts’ subjectivity itself were differently articulated in various textual genres. To do so, Rothman employs Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope (space-time frame) and identifies two prototypical accounts of the spatiotemporal process of conversion prevalent in narratives of conversion from Ottoman Islam and Protestantism to Catholicism, respectively, and points to the key role of Venetian institutions and intermediaries in articulating both.

Addressing the theme of agency, Philip Major examines two hitherto neglected texts written by the Church of England minister and author Samuel Smith (1584–1665) and published in 1632. While each can stand on its own as an essentially orthodox Church of England exposition of conversion, Major situates *The Admirable Convert* and *The Ethiopian Eunuchs Conversion*, one concerned with a thief and the other a powerful court official, as complementary companion pieces in order to address the modes of thought and argument attendant on both the authorship and reception of such works. Central to his analysis is the issue of agency in conversion, particularly the extent to which an individual can help to effect his own conversion, which in turn informs a discussion of how Smith subtly attends to the possibility of backsliding in readers.

Although the word ‘conversion’, especially in literary studies, almost uniformly signals an internal choice played out largely in the realm of the individual, Jayme Yeo’s contribution examines the work of John Donne in the broader socio-political context of England, particularly the poet’s practice of instilling Catholic symbolism with Protestant meaning as a way of imagining England’s religious conversion on the large scale. A changing world resulting from doctrinal schisms and colonization abroad meant that many of the ideas that had traditionally underwritten Catholic symbolism were destabilized. Yeo offers a close reading of three of Donne’s poems to discover how each capitalizes on these religious and geographical shifts and engages different aspects of redefining symbolic identity.

While James Shirley's (1596–1666) own religious convictions are unclear, in his play *St Patrick for Ireland* (published in 1640) he represents the complex process of Ireland's conversion from paganism to Christianity. Alison Searle argues in her essay that Shirley's reworking of Ireland's key hagiographical narrative is a targeted attempt to engage with issues of political and religious controversy. Shirley deliberately chose to focus on a narrative that was at the core of Irish Catholic self-identity. By adopting an anachronistic form of theatre, drawing on the traditions of medieval drama, Shirley represents conversion in *St Patrick for Ireland* as inherently dramatic. This enabled him to validate the theatre's position as a medium of agency and exchange in the religious and political debates that were preoccupying his Dublin audiences.

To round out the topic of agency, Lise Gosseye examines Constan-tijn Huygens' (1596–1687) poem *Ooghentroost*, completed in January 1647. The poem can be read as a consolatory letter for his friend Lucretia van Trello, who was steadily going blind due to cataracts. However, in a broader context, it also can be understood as a satire, a commonplace book, a literary autobiography and a highly personal meditation on the poet's reading of different philosophers. Gosseye contends that Huygens' *Ooghentroost*, in an effort that is typical of the early-modern humanist as well as the strict Calvinist, combines the Augustinian content of Grace with the Stoics' ethical reading practice in which Reason dominates the other faculties. He does so, she argues, in order for reading to become an epiphanic act that inspires conversion – an acceptance of Grace that involves a change in behaviour. Gosseye goes on to situate the poem in the intellectual framework William Bouwsma has provided for the Renaissance in his famous text, 'The Two Faces of Humanism. Stoicism and Augustinianism in Renaissance Thought', and shows how the confrontation of humanism's two faces in a single text can shed a new and interesting light on the early-modern self.

The *Ars Moriendi*, a well-known, mid-fifteenth-century handbook for preparing Christians for death, is an example of a conversion guideline meant to be contemplated and imitated. It provides an example that, if internalized and followed correctly, promises to increase a soul's chances of attaining heaven or, at the very least, of avoiding hell. However, as John Decker shows in his examination of the woodcut illustrations that accompany the text, conversion and the purification of the soul that led to salvation were not one-time,

static events, but ongoing, dynamic processes. As the author states, the faithful understood that (re)conversion was a life-long prospect that required patience and effort. Contrary to modern scholarly assumptions, the Protestant doctrine of 'once saved, always saved' did not hold true for late medieval Christians. Decker argues that the images of Moriens, the main character in the *Ars Moriendi*, are not simple depictions of early modern anxieties surrounding death. As a stand-in for Everyman, Moriens enacts the critical moment in which the *liberum arbitrium* (free will) must discern and choose between full conversion and abandoning the soul to the apostasy of sin. Moriens's struggle, as offered in the *Ars Moriendi*, drove home to Christians that the state of their souls was never certain and that proper conversion was the only way to address any lingering doubt.

Another example that deals with the theme of imitation is the Catholic homiletic work of the convert Vitale Medici, previously known as Rabbi Jehiel of Pesaro, which forms the subject of Shulamit Furstenberg-Levi's contribution. Furstenberg examines two of Medici's sermons as a case-study of the phenomenon of conversion from Judaism to Catholicism during the Counter-Reformation period in Italy. In addition to preaching to a Christian public, Vitale Medici also had the task of converting Florentine Jews who were forced to attend his sermons attesting to his new faith. As the author explains it, in his capacity as a convert, Vitale utilized the possibility of moving between 'cultural territories' in a variety of ways: at times, yet not often, he entered into the 'Jewish territory' with the intention of meeting his audience on a common ground, benefiting from his knowledge of their world in order to create a more convincing and efficient rhetoric; other times he clearly remained in his new 'Christian territory', while emphasizing the *differentiation* and the borders between his old world and his new world, showing why he belongs to the one and not to the other. As such, his sermons reflect the complex phenomenon of conversion, especially regarding the question of continuity versus discontinuity.

Discernment and imitation are also taken up in Walter Melion's essay, which examines the correspondence between images in Jerónimo Nadal's *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia* (*Annotations and Meditations on the [Liturgical] Gospels*). Composed by Nadal at the behest of Ignatius of Loyola, and issued in 1595–1596 by the publisher Martinus Nutius of Antwerp, the *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia* consists of 153 chapters, each based on an *imago* portraying one or more scenes from the life of Christ. Through the interaction

of the images, as well as image and text, Melion argues that the viewer experiences the parable as an heuristic instrument of faith, designed by Christ himself to activate the faculty of spiritual discernment. Reading the parable requires that its familiar images be converted into metaphors of Gospel truths. In turn, the ability to construe images as metaphors bears witness to an internal process of conversion that opens the spiritual eyes of the reader, making it possible for these metaphoric truths to be revealed and understood. For Nadal, through close visual analysis, interpretative *conversio* aligns with *conversio* of the spirit, and in this sense, conversion plays out as a process of translation that jointly operates as a process of transformation.

Bart Ramakers' article focuses on a Dutch dramatisation of St. Paul's conversion story, as recounted in Acts 9:1–19, titled *The Conversion of Paul* (*De Bekeeringe Pauli*). The play was written by an anonymous rhetorician from Brabant, possibly originating from Vilvoorde, and is dated at roughly the middle of the sixteenth century. By examining the way in which Paul's conversion is given shape, both verbally and visually, Ramakers argues that it serves as a particular type of spiritual model to follow. Rather than taking a purely textual approach, which has led to rhetoricians' plays being understood within the context of Protestant and Catholic theological controversies of the time, the author shows that the play's primary goal was to bring its audience members to an expression of a personal relationship with God that is experienced inwardly, in the heart, and which transcended contemporary religious disputes.

Finally, Xander van Eck's contribution offers a close visual analysis of a monumental sculpted pulpit designed by Michiel Vervoort. The wooden structure was originally installed in the Church of the Leliendael convent of Norbertine nuns, but later moved to St. Rombout Cathedral. Van Eck argues that the pulpit offers up St. Norbert, the founding saint of the Norbertine order, as an example to follow, particularly since the saint's conversion is modeled after that of St. Paul. While the figure of the saint falling off his horse greets the viewer at ground level, the pulpit also serves as a theatrical stage on which the priest processes and performs his sermon. The pulpit's composition functions as a visual theological accompaniment to the ephemeral nature of the preaching of the Word.



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PART ONE

AUTHENTICITY



LA CONFESSION CATHOLIQUE DU SIEUR DE SANCY:  
THE SWAN SONG OF THE ZEALOUS PROTESTANTS

Mathilde Bernard

When Henry III died under the knife of Jacques Clément in 1589, Henry de Bourbon, the king of Navarre and the chief of the Protestants, suddenly became king of France.<sup>1</sup> But he was not accepted as such by all his subjects, for many considered that the king had to be Catholic. He had to fight to gain the confidence of the French and make the rebel towns surrender. Years later, Paris still had not given in. So, eventually, Henry IV finally had to convert to Catholicism in 1593, so as to become the legitimate king of all his subjects. He was crowned in 1594. Many people, both Protestants and Catholics, decided to support him, believing that peace was what mattered most, and that it could not be reached without conceding this token of conversion to the people. Therefore, for the sake of security, not to mention self-interest, many Protestants converted to Catholicism at the end of the sixteenth century. But a few zealous Protestants still refused to convert, or even to accept the very idea of converting. For them, it only meant the death of the Party, and much worse, it was a supreme betrayal of God. They knew the walk of history was against them, and that the chances for the Protestant Party to be reinforced diminished by the day, but they still wanted to voice their virulent disagreement and show their absolute fidelity to God. The Protestant representations of converting often showed blind hatred against the unfaithful, against those who deny their faith for the sake of self-interest.

In that context of political turmoil, Agrippa d'Aubigné wrote the *Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy*<sup>2</sup> to denounce the conversion of the sieur Nicolas Harlay de Sancy, the superintendent of finances

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Amel Toumi and Virginie Passot for their help in the translation of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Agrippa d'Aubigné, *Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy et declaration des causes, tant d'estat que de religion, qui l'ont meu a se remettre au giron de l'Eglise Romaine, Recueil de diverses pièces servant à l'histoire d'Henri III* (Cologne: Pierre Marteau, 1660); edition used: Agrippa d'Aubigné, *La Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy*, in Id., *Œuvres*, ed. Weber H. – Bailbé J. – Soulié M. (Paris: 1969) 575–666.

under Henry IV. On the 10th of May 1597, four years after having prompted his master Henry IV to take the 'perilous leap', Sancy converted to Catholicism. He thus became, in the eyes of zealous Protestants, the incarnation of baseness and vileness. Yet, he was not the only one. Though no one was threatened (by fire, daggers or arquebuses) into conversion anymore, people were strongly driven to it: conversion was seen as a way to potentially rise in society and to show fidelity to the king – such motives were likely to hook the reckless and unwise fish. Such was, at least, Agrippa d'Aubigné's view on the matter, when depicting in his *Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* the disastrous era when 'on peschait à l'endormie'.<sup>3</sup> In this virulent book, published several years after its author's death by the notorious Pierre Marteau, an imaginary publisher, Aubigné creates a fiction around the confession of Sancy, where the latter provides justification for his conversion, which he could have actually done in reality. Important public characters were often asked by Catholics to clearly state the authenticity of their new faith and to show proselytism.

The *Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* is above all a lampoon, that is, according to Yvonne Bellenger, 'a violent and passionate paper which tries to disqualify an opponent or an idea'.<sup>4</sup> It takes the shape of a pastiche of the genre of the confession, but the first intention of the author is to destroy a man and not to parody a style. His weapon is irony. What makes this text genuinely original is the way Aubigné makes Sancy's conversion meaningless by turning the genre of the 'confession' into a parody. Although false conversions had already been denounced on both sides, and although a priest from the League, Jean Boucher, had already published the *Sermons de la simulée conversion* dealing with Henry IV's conversion, the debate had been confined to the serious genre.<sup>5</sup> As for Aubigné, he attacked Sancy in a new manner, by turning the movements of his will and soul into ridicule. In doing so, he also debunked the genre of the 'confession', by highlighting how it realized the domination of political matters over spirituality, which he found loathsome.

<sup>3</sup> Aubigné, *La Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* 618.

<sup>4</sup> Bellenger Y., "Le Pamphlet avant le pamphlet: le mot et la chose", *Cahier de l'association internationale des études françaises* 36 (1984) 94: 'un écrit véhément et passionné qui cherche à disqualifier un adversaire ou une idée'.

<sup>5</sup> Jean Boucher, *Sermons de la simulée conversion, et nullité de la prétendue absolution de Henry de Bourbon, Prince de Bearn, à S. Denis en France, le Dimanche 25 juillet 1593*, (Paris, G. Chaudière: 1594).

Through an analysis of Aubigné's text, I would like to point out the rhetorical means used by the Protestants against conversion at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As Michel Perronnet wrote,

The Confession de Sancy of Agrippa d'Aubigné can be read as a historic document, that is as a testimony full of information, replaced in a specific time and space. In that case, the document shows the religious oppositions in France at the end of the 16th century.<sup>6</sup>

But it may also be read for itself. It is not just the trace of historical facts, it is also a trace of the Protestants' strategy: perverting true facts in order to voice their own truth. Gilbert Schrenck, who dedicated his thesis and several books to this lampoon, shows how the *Sancy* 'exactly reflects this anguish of the generalized conspiracy, by which the disloyal brothers precipitate the loss of those who remained faithful'.<sup>7</sup> Anguish is being twisted into irony in order to ward off evil fate. So, I would like to examine how irony functions in the text, and to what extent it participates in constructing representations of the apostate at the turn of the century.

The use of irony in the text is so constant that it almost functions to destroy itself. The author refuses to envisage the definitely modern meaning of these conversions, to consider for one second the notion that the converted could not after all have wanted to actually serve the king and the national good, and were not just moved by self-interest. As a result, Aubigné wrote a fake confession for what he considered to be a fake conversion, therefore rejecting the very principle of Sancy's gesture. The writer wages an endless war against the Catholic doctrine, which he views as void anyway. Yet, one is likely to wonder whether the unfettered and cathartic – though entertaining – use of irony might not finally discredit his line of argument in favour of Protestantism.

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<sup>6</sup> Perronnet M., "La Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy", *Bulletin de l'Association d'étude sur l'humanisme, la Réforme et la Renaissance* 10 (1979) 24: 'La Confession de Sancy d'Agrippa d'Aubigné peut être lue comme un document historique, c'est-à-dire comme un témoignage porteur d'informations, replacé dans un temps et dans un espace. Dans ce cas précis, le document porte témoignage sur les oppositions religieuses en France à la fin du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle'.

<sup>7</sup> Schrenck G., *L'Or et la boue. Agrippa d'Aubigné et la Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy. Contribution à l'étude du pamphlet albinéen* (unpublished dissertation Paris IV – Sorbonne 1994) 397–398: '[Le Sancy] reflète exactement cette angoisse du complot généralisé, où les frères parjures précipitent la perte de ceux qui sont restés fidèles'.

*A Dismantled Confession for a Misguided Conversion*

The Protestants who converted to Catholicism after the king were suspected of being driven by pure self-interest. Therefore, they needed to articulate strong arguments against this criticism. In *La Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy*, Agrippa d'Aubigné wrote what could have been Sancy's justification in his place. But when he attempts to create a text that might pass as versatile, his line of argument only turns out to make the apostate look like more of a sophist.

Yet, Sancy never gave such a confession. He waited longer than Jean de Sponde or Pierre Victor Palma Cayet to convert.<sup>8</sup> Those individuals were not spared by Aubigné either, but it seems that Sancy is the privileged target of all his hatred. Why is that so? There was a time when the diplomat embodied everything Aubigné wanted to be, and above all, to remain: a close relative of Henry IV and a man endowed with high responsibilities who the king trusts. The sieur de Sancy also fell into disgrace, but Agrippa d'Aubigné is thought never to have forgiven him for being able to last longer than him, and, what's more, by means he viewed as lowering, dishonest and corrupt. Choosing Sancy as the hero and narrator of the *Confession* had also to do with a partisan logic as much as with the satisfaction of revenge. Cayet and Sponde held a more important share of the theological polemic marketplace. Sancy's conversion was mainly exploited by the Catholics as an *exemplum* to promote conversion, and the man had been relatively spared by the Protestants so far. Aubigné decided to let the Protestants' voice be heard on the matter.

The sieur de Sancy's intellectual guide, to whom the fictitious confession is dedicated, was none other than Jacques Davy Du Perron, the 'Great Converter', who, although he was no prince to defend his people,<sup>9</sup> was such a superficial believer, according to Aubigné, that he could support just as skilfully any idea and any belief.<sup>10</sup> Aubigné's text focuses on the moment of the fall, and even more on the stupidly

<sup>8</sup> Jean de Sponde converted in 1593 and Pierre-Victor Palma Cayet in 1595.

<sup>9</sup> See Aubigné, *La Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* 575: 'Je n'ay pas voulu faire comme ces ignorans, lesquels ayant quelque œuvre douteux à mettre au vent [...] cherchent pour la deffence de leurs escrits les uns le Roy, [...] les autres quelque Prince non mesdisant'.

<sup>10</sup> Aubigné, *La Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* 575: 'C'est en vostre sein capable de toutes choses, Monsieur mon Convertisseur, que j'ay voulu jeter ce petit avorton, vous ayant ouï (par manière de passetemps) deffendre l'Alcoran de



servile relationship between the one who prompted the fall and the one who actually fell. The narrator shows Du Perron as a character who succeeded remarkably in getting what he wanted, a talent he owed less to his qualities as a theologian or even as an orator than to his skills as a socialite. Therefore, Sancy being one of Du Perron's followers, his converting is disparaged; and, the *Confession* being dedicated to Du Perron, it is turned into a mere social gesture. The king asks the bishop to 'bring evidence of Divinity',<sup>11</sup> which is a historical fact. Du Perron was notorious for his talents as a polemist, and he 'delights the ladies'.<sup>12</sup> All his deeds had to do with appearance, a divinity to which the hypocrites vowed their fake faith in exchange for a place on the social scene. The very principle of a confession complies with no other norms. To the zealous Protestants at the end of the sixteenth century, every conversion to Catholicism was driven by ruthless ambition.

In the *Confession*, Sancy repeatedly declares in his naivety<sup>13</sup> that his personal interest was his only motive to convert to Catholicism,<sup>14</sup> therefore annihilating the very point of his so-called confession. Du Perron prompted him to choose this utilitarian vision of religion. Apparently, according to Aubigné, it did not take long for Sancy to gather that it was for his own good, as the character wrote at the end of his dedication:

I understand what you say about the Scriptures, that your advice is sufficient to turn me into a wise man, not entirely for my salvation, but enough to allow me to reach what I want.<sup>15</sup>

The addition of 'not entirely for my salvation' shows with which casualty the narrator deals with religion. There again, his attitude betrays

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Mahomet et le Talmud des Juifs, avec telle dextérité, que les esprits des auditeurs furent mipartis'.

<sup>11</sup> Aubigné, *La Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* 575–576. The word itself, 'Divinité', seems to be here laden with an irony which has to be applied this time to Henry IV. The matter is not to prove that one religion is better than another, but to question the idea of the existence of God. Aubigné therefore suggests that the king is above all an atheist.

<sup>12</sup> 'Il [ravist] les dames en admiration'.

<sup>13</sup> If not in his great cynicism; on these bearings, see Schrenck, *L'Or et la boue*.

<sup>14</sup> This is reasserted many times in the *Sancy*, and it is the subject of the whole of chapter II, 3: 'Des Causes qui me pousserent à ma seconde reformation, qui fut la troisieme conversion', 636ff.

<sup>15</sup> Aubigné, *La Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* 577: 'Je l'entends donc comme vous dites d'elles que vos conseils sont suffisans pour me faire devenir sage, non pas entierement à salut, mais pour me faire parvenir à ce que je desire'.

that his conversion was not about religion. However, this interpolated clause symbolises the point where all those mundane conversions will fail.<sup>16</sup> Fear of God had not entirely disappeared, and salvation came to torment the apostate, an anguish which will grow stronger by the end of the *Confession*. The very attempt at justifying oneself becomes a sign of weakness. And Sancy's lack of conviction is made even more obvious when he starts going through every single matter on which Catholicism and Protestantism differ, as though, from one day to the next<sup>17</sup> everything on which Sancy's faith rested had been destroyed and turned upside down. As a zealous Protestant showing his righteous fear of God, Aubigné intends to demonstrate that converting for social reasons is not only despicable, but that it is above all dangerous for the soul. The confession fails because of that feeling of anguish the apostate is doomed to experiment.

The structure of Aubigné's lampoon follows roughly the canvass of the new Catholics' writings of justification as well as proselyte writings. If we compare it to the *Remonstrance et supplication tres-humble à Madame...*,<sup>18</sup> written by Pierre-Victor Palma Cayet in 1601 to convert Catherine du Bar, Henry IV's Protestant sister, we notice that every single point is reviewed by Agrippa d'Aubigné. Considerations on the 'esprit ministral', the ministerial spirit, are scattered in II, 7 ('De l'impudence des Huguenots'), the argumentation on saints in I, 3 ('De l'intercession des saints et des saintes'), on Purgatory in I, 4, the Holy Sacrament in I, 10 ('De la transsubstantiation'), the church works in I, 5. Each time, the author ridicules the defence of Catholic religion through the words of a narrator who constantly offers better proof of the stupid pointlessness of his choice. Aubigné overdoes it by adding extra parts, or by dividing chapters. Therefore, the reflection on the 'Decrets & Canons des Saints Peres & Docteurs de nostre mere Sainte Eglise de toute antiquité' is placed in I, 2 ('Des Traditions')

<sup>16</sup> See Schrenck, *L'Or et la boue* 375ff.

<sup>17</sup> Once Sancy had made up his mind, the conversion happened very quickly.

<sup>18</sup> Pierre Victor Palma Cayet, *Remonstrance et supplication tres-humble a Madame sœur unique du Roy, Princesse de Navarre & de Lorraine, Duchesse de Bar & d'Albret &c. pour vouloir recognoistre nostre mere Sainte Eglise Catholique Apostolique et Romaine. Adressée à l'Altesse tres-Illustre & Serenissime de Monseigneur, le duc de Lorraine. Avec la refutation de Jacques Couet soy disant Ministre (pretendu) sur la Conference (pretendue) qu'il a mise en avant tenuë à Nancy en Lorraine, comme il dit. Ensembled la response Latine au mémoire dudit Couet. Adressée à l'Illustrissime & Reverendissime Monseigneur le Cardinal de Lorraine* (Paris: Guillaume Binet, 1601).

and in II, 6 ('Examen de quelques livres de ce temps'). The biting irony lies partly in the way Catholic truth is seen as a relative notion, and in the way it is therefore being nullified. Controversy necessarily had to do with politics at the time when Aubigné wrote. Though Cayet starts his *Remonstrance* with personal attacks against Jacques Couet<sup>19</sup> and ends it trying to convince Catherine du Bar that the Protestants always meant to sacrifice her brother to their cause,<sup>20</sup> it consists essentially of discussions on theology. As for Aubigné, he mixes the genres to better prove the profanity of converting. If the titles of the first book seem to abide by a structure typical of a *Confession* or a *Remonstrance* (and, yet – and this is not devoid of irony – Aubigné already shows how justification and proselytising are mixed from the very beginning) the chapter on 'Reliques et devotion du feu Roy' in I, 7 denounces how politics and religion are inseparable, a point which Aubigné stresses with vehement energy in II, 2 ('De la reunion des religions'). Book II smacks of Menippean satire. It opens on a burlesque dialogue between Mathurine and the young Du Perron, a sum of insanities filled with destructive humour, moves on to political considerations ('De la reunion des religions') and to Sancy's personal and non-theoretical justification ('Des causes qui me pousserent à ma seconde reformation [...]', 'Apologétique pour ma longue demeure entre les hérétiques'), and ends on the expression of an outlook which, in a very albinean fashion, and more broadly in a Protestant fashion, highlights the troubles of Sancy's conscience to show the unhappiness of apostates.

The structure of Sancy's justification falls apart, which is a clever way to prove his lack of self-confidence as to his conversion. In itself, by its very form and its existence (as a fiction, of course), the *Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* is an expression of the falseness of Catholic faith and of any kind of justification for it. However, this structure can only be better understood in the context of the use of irony throughout the text. Every single argument defended by the delightfully stupid character of the text is being destroyed by Agrippa d'Aubigné with systematic relentlessness.

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<sup>19</sup> Cayet, *Remonstrance* 6. Jacques Couet is the author of a *Réfutation* attacking Pierre Victor Palma Cayet and blaming him for his conversion.

<sup>20</sup> Cayet, *Remonstrance* 95ff.

*Shapeless and Unfounded*

The Catholic religion, *a fortiori* when it is chosen, is, at best, to follow the king as a means to alleviate political tensions in the kingdom; at worst, it is merely for the sake of self-interest, described as calculated and based on the observation of terrestrial and human facts, and impossible to detach from social considerations. Agrippa d'Aubigné's seething irony follows an old clerical tradition, but with violence that puts the finishing touch on debunking the process. The Catholic faith is presented as so absurd that it could not really exist in anyone. One could only be Catholic because they have an interest in it. That is what the author suggests through Sancy's slips of the tongue and bursts of naivety.

The narrator keeps bringing earthly reasons to account for spiritual matters, which not only discredits the Catholic doctrine entirely, but, conversely, is also a disgrace for the king, who thought himself entitled to decide on the relationships between men and God by subsuming religion under politics.<sup>21</sup> For instance, Sancy's character intends to prove the intercession of saints as follows:

Lacking arguments, our doctors prove most of the points which are in controversy by strapping resemblances and comparisons, and this is how we prove the intercession of the saints: everybody does not indifferently present their requests to the king, but people have mediators, such as princes, members of the Council of State, inspectors of the king: *Ergo* saints have to do their business in the sky just as we do ours in Court.<sup>22</sup>

Catholic controversists are lowered to the level of sophists, making up for the weakness of their demonstration with figures of speech. Appearances, in one's speech as well as in one's behaviour, become the only criteria of judgement. The intercession of saints is established by a syllogism drawing a parallel between the attitudes of the courtiers towards the king on the one hand, and that of the Catholics towards

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<sup>21</sup> As it is shown by Henry IV's conversion, but also by the signature of the 'édit de Nantes' which occurred in 1598.

<sup>22</sup> Aubigné, *La Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* 588: 'À faute d'arguments nos Docteurs prouvent la plus part des points qui sont en controverse par gaillardes similitudes et comparaisons, et voici comme nous prouvons l'intercession des Saints et des Saintes: Toutes personnes ne vont pas indifferemment presenter leurs requestes au Roy, mais par mediateurs, comme Princes, Princesses, Conseillers d'Estat et Maistres des Requestes: Ergo il faut que les Saints et les Saintes fassent leurs affaires du Ciel, comme nous faisons ceux de la Cour'.

God on the other hand. The image is not devoid of humour: the saints merely mimic the actions of the counsellors of the State and masters of requests. Since the comparison is obvious, the syllogism turns into an enthymeme, and the ellipse of the minor clause ('God is in the sky what a king is upon earth') stands out even more. The Catholics do not exactly invert the relationship to God, they make it trivial and meaningless. The kingdom of God is reduced to a mere court, and praying to bargaining. Similarly, Sancy, unable to find proof of the existence of Purgatory in canonical texts, 'decides on its existence by that of the Third Party'.<sup>23</sup> Those who try to find a middle way (the 'moyenneurs'), whom the author loathes, might well have gathered to make up an influential party. The sky itself has had to organize a middle way. There again, the trivialization of the sky falls back on Sancy's Third Party, which led Henry IV to conversion. If Purgatory is a middle way, it remains a place of pain and suffering. The French did not make their fate any better by giving into the Third Party.

So far, the author has not invented anything; he simply deprecates the meaning of some words ('mediator' and then 'Purgatory'), establishes parallels and therefore ridicules Catholicism. However, in a more systematic way, he uses his narrator to nullify the meaning of his conversion by making him bring more and more proof of the superiority of Protestantism over Catholicism. Thus, for the Protestants at the end of the century, to discredit the goal of conversion is to emphasize the emptiness of the Catholic faith.

In his lampoon, Aubigné wanted to prove that the foundations of Catholic theology are not certain, and that the Catholics themselves are wary of the holy texts. Sancy expresses himself in these terms concerning the weight of traditions:

We have to stick to the books of the Church and not the canonical ones, otherwise the heretics would defame what we say with passages from the Bible.<sup>24</sup>

Traditions guarantee Catholicism since they support it. For the Protestants, such reasoning was a false syllogism. Since the Catholics could

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<sup>23</sup> Aubigné, *La Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* 590: 'decide [de son] existence par celle du Tiers Parti'.

<sup>24</sup> Aubigné, *La Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* 582: 'Il faut se tenir aux livres de l'Eglise et non aux Canoniques, autrement les heretiques diffameroient nos affaires avec les passages de Bible'.

not rely on the Bible, they claimed as a doctrine anything that enabled them to argue the inarguable. The doctors' authority would have been enough to prove Catholicism right. For that end, the doctors would have had to conform themselves to the spirit of the Bible. According to the Protestants, they did not. Aubigné transforms that sophism into a reasoning which states that they must rely on doctors because their religion does not conform to the Bible, therefore they cannot rely on the Bible, because if they do, their belief could be refuted.

By using such tricks, Aubigné implies, the Catholics often betrayed themselves; the same goes for Sancy, which he foregrounds by reporting on the Nicole Aubry episode, about the demoniac of Laon.<sup>25</sup> During her exorcism in the years 1565–1566, the demons that spoke through her denounced the mistakes of the heretics. The narrator stresses how inconsistent the exorcists' methods to fight the Huguenots were:

The one who educated the demonic of Laon was foolish to teach her to say that it was necessary to extirpate the Huguenots; because, as notices Postel, it would mean that the devil is careful of our own good.<sup>26</sup>

The Catholics are not only accused of bad faith, having to use dubious methods to overcome Protestantism, but also of being stupid. By wanting to be too subtle, they condemn themselves once again. So Aubigné manages to ridicule the Catholics line after line, going as far as to show them in postures worthy of a farce, but quite a sardonic one. The representation of the converted Protestants becomes an unrefined and merciless comedy.

### *An Irony Without Limits*

In conformity with a relatively trivial tradition, Aubigné uses Sancy to criticise the mores of the clergy. And, in strict accordance with humanistic narrations,<sup>27</sup> he grounds his anecdotes on puns. Since

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<sup>25</sup> The exorcism ceremonies that took place in the cathedral of Laon in the years 1565–1566 were used by the Catholics as means of propaganda against the Protestants. The case was well known as the time.

<sup>26</sup> Aubigné, *La Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* 599: 'Celui qui instruisoit le Demoniacque de Laon, fit bien le sot de lui apprendre à dire qu'il falloit extirper les Huguenots; car comme remarque Postel, cela sonneroit que le Diable fut soigneux de nostre bien'.

<sup>27</sup> One could think of the play on words that François Rabelais or Bonaventure des Périers appreciated.

Sancy's character is too plain, he uses another character's mouth to place his witty phrases. It is the case, for instance, in the confusion made between 'pieux' and 'pie', 'pious' and 'magpie', upon which is based the narration of the escapades of the bishop and the abbess of Saintes:

Sometimes the bishop and the abbess hide in some out of the way places especially accommodated, and then all the convent worships because they went to pious works. Everybody wondered what kind of works it could be, but the prior of Pont l'Abbé having taken them by surprise, wrote to Mr. de Pontonville what they were saying: "The bishop and the abbess of Saintes often go to silent places to do their pious work. The most clever one in the convent spies on them, and when she sees the black alb over the white overcoat, she understands what kind of a mag-pious work it is."<sup>28</sup>

The Catholics not only use false arguments: they are also smart liars. Beyond the good word and the image of an animalized couple pictured as a vulgar feathered creature, which, on top of that, has the reputation of being a robber, it is a serious accusation which Agrippa d'Aubigné levels at them through Sancy's reporting the words of Jeanne de La Rochefoucauld, the abbess' sister. All Catholics would know about the indecent behaviour of their co-religionists, and all would agree to laughing about it rather than taking offence. Adhering to Catholicism therefore means, in Aubigné's point of view, accepting a life of compromise and lies. In this anecdote, the author is not so much attacking the doctrines as those who support them. When irony and satire are used to attack people, they become limitless and they ignite the text with a passion for hate that threatens to destroy its foundations.

Aubigné is full of hate for all the Sancys, the Cayets, the Spondes, and the others recently converted, but attacking their beliefs is not enough: he wants to attack the men. Therefore, the *Sancy* is full of slander that cannot simply be for the sake of disqualifying Catholic theology and struggling against apostasy. He sows unjustified and apparently

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<sup>28</sup> Aubigné, *La Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* 617: 'Quelques fois l'Evesque et l'Abbesse se derobent en quelques lieux desrobez et accomodez exprez, et lors tout le couvent est en devotion, pour ce que Monsieur et Madame sont allez aux œuvres pies. Chascun estoit en peine quelles œuvres c'estoient: mais la Prieuse du Pont l'Abbé, les ayant un jour decouverts, escrivit à M. de Pontonville ce que c'estoit en ces termes: L'Evesque et l'Abbesse de Xainctes, / Pour faire œuvres pies et saintes, / Vont au silence fort souvent. / La plus finette du Convent / Y fait un trou, et les espie, / Puis voyant presser flanc à flanc, / Le roquet noir, le surcot blanc, / Vit bien que c'estoit œuvre pie'.

superfluous accusations. Therefore, Sancy explains that he converted in reaction to the misery of Huguenots and explicitly declares that he refuses poverty, which is not being very Christian altogether:

You don't change when you always follow the same aim. My aim was always profit, honor, wealth and security. When I could be a Huguenot and reach my goals I did. When I felt inconvenient in it, dishonor, sorrow, danger, I would have been fickle if I had changed my aims in a radical way. That is why I followed my goal and just changed means.<sup>29</sup>

This attack is both base and easy. Sancy did not hesitate to put his career in peril by talking Henry IV out of marrying Gabrielle d'Estrées. Why would he have accepted to convert out of pure personal interest while he so often gave evidence of his devotion to the State?<sup>30</sup> But Agrippa d'Aubigné does not hesitate to level such accusations that, yet again, have to do with the reasons for conversion.

When he mentions Sponde's wife's easy virtue at the very beginning of the book, calumny is absolutely pointless. Sancy thus explains why he decided to write his *Confession*:

I really hesitated to make a big opened statement, because only public persons can reveal papers in broad daylight; but the late Mr. De Sponde taught me to overcome this difficulty, although he had nothing public but his wife.<sup>31</sup>

Humour lies in the wantonness of the attack, and the complicity it creates with the reader. Since we understand from the very beginning that Aubigné did not set any limits for himself, the reader becomes

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<sup>29</sup> Aubigné, *La Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* 641: 'Ce n'est pas changer que de suivre tousjours mesme but. J'ay eu pour but, sans changer, le profit, l'honneur, l'aise et la seurté. Tant que le dessein d'estre Huguenot a esté conforme à ces quatre fins je l'ai suivi sans changer. Quant au contraire j'ay veu dommage, honte, peine et danger, c'eust esté inconstance de changer des desseins opposez diametralement. J'ay donc suivi mon but, je n'ay changé que de moyens'.

<sup>30</sup> This is what Gilbert Schrenck suggests in *Nicolas de Harlay, sieur de Sancy* 14: 'How can we recognize in Sancy this man without faith and without scrupule that Aubigné presents as The apostate, one of the most important servants of the State of the second half of the sixteenth century?': 'Comment, en effet, reconnaître dans Sancy, cet homme sans foi et sans scrupule, présenté par d'Aubigné comme l'apostat par excellence, un des plus grands serviteurs de l'État de la seconde moitié du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle?'

<sup>31</sup> Aubigné, *La Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* 576: 'Je faisois une grande difficulté [de faire une ample et publique declaration], n'appartenant qu'à personnes publiques de mettre au vent des escrits manifestes; mais feu Monsieur de Sponde m'a appris à vaincre cette difficulté, encore qu'il n'eust rien de public que sa femme'.



pleased with such a deliciously mean lampoon and starts taking part in lowering Sancy's image, as well as that of other apostates. What's more, Aubigné does not content himself with one time only. The grating irony of the lampoon rests on the principle of return and exaggeration. A few pages later, once again, the author, through Sancy, refers to Sponde's wife, trying to make calumny pass off as some sort of aetiological research in which he himself does not believe:

Mr. Converter found the invention to push so far the baits in the fish-hook that the fish is taken and the bait is not swallowed. The poor De Sponde witnessed that the bait was for someone else, and, having sacrificed his soul to the Church, he was so deceived that he saw, before dying, his children abandoned, his wife to the brothel, and himself to the poorhouse.<sup>32</sup>

If Sponde's wife prostitutes herself, it is because Du Perron's moral contracts are fool's bargains. As a matter of fact, converting brings no fortune whatsoever. Aubigné spreads out his verve with art in a double calumny that, however cruel it may be, can only bring the reader to smile at the shameless perseverance of the author.

He does not risk anything, since Sponde died and no longer poses a threat. But when the author openly attacks Henry IV's honesty and faithfulness, one understands that Aubigné is driven partly by hate and partly by the concern, sublime in its integrity and naivety, to restore justice:

Now let us see what became of those who enjoyed keeping their faith to the king and to the State, who wanted to be righteous, thinking that the righteous man had to live on his faith. Those who made works worthy of repentance, and not good works, and very well felt that faith without works is dead; so they now starve.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Aubigné, *La Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* 619: 'M. le Convertisseur [Jacques Davy du Perron] a trouvé l'invention de mettre les appasts si avant dans l'haim que le poisson est pris, sans que l'appast soit avallé. Tesmoing le pauvre de Sponde, duquel l'appast a esté pour un autre, et qui ayant sacrifié son ame pour l'Eglise, a tellement esté pippé, qu'il a veu avant que mourir, ses enfans aux portes, sa femme au bordeau, et sa personne à l'hospital'.

<sup>33</sup> Aubigné, *La Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* 594: 'Or voyons que sont devenus ceux qui se sont amusez à garder la foy au Roy et à l'Estat, qui ont voulu estre justes, pensans que le juste doit vivre de sa foy. Ceux là ont fait œuvres dignes de repentance, et non pas bonnes œuvres, et ont fort bien senti que la foy sans les œuvres est morte; aussi meurent-ils de faim'.

One can feel in this violent dig at Henry IV the extent of the bitterness of a man who felt betrayed and who is all the more angry at Sancy for having gained an enviable position in court. The double meaning, both religious and profane, of the word 'foy' allows once again Agrippa d'Aubigné to include religion within the realm of politics, by using his denunciation for a more profound judgement on how politics dominates religion.

He goes even further though, into sheer pornography in the dialogue between Mathurine, a crazy woman in Henry IV's Court, and Jean Davy du Perron, the bishop's brother. Du Perron randomly meets Mathurine, and an animated conversation begins, full of familiarity between the two protagonists. Du Perron relates the instruction he gave to the baron of Sainte-Marie in order to make him convert. Mathurine replies:

And do you think that I do not know which game you played, instead of arguing? My friend, it was me who enters everywhere, and who entered the first one in familiarity with him: I taught him the cair of the hunt, the hunt of the cair:<sup>34</sup> I put my hand on his fly, as privately as I did with you the first time we met.<sup>35</sup>

Aubigné renounces any kind of subtlety and puts the finishing touches on this tableau of depravity and shame. In that world, people change religion like sexual partners and instruction is synonymous with seduction. Seduction is attractive only for those whose soul is already depraved, those who have a taste for vulgarity.

### *Conclusion*

What Aubigné wrote is not an argumentation, but a violent lampoon of which the gist is to attack a man on his stupidity or sexual habits.<sup>36</sup> Arguing seems pointless. The uneasiness of Philippe Duplessis-Mornay,

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<sup>34</sup> This is a spoonerism.

<sup>35</sup> Aubigné, *La Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* 624: 'Et penses-tu que je ne sache pas à quel jeu vous jouâstes, au lieu de disputer? Mon ami, ce fut moy qui entre partout, et qui entray la premiere en familiarité avec lui: je lui appris le pont du coil, le coil du pont: je lui mis la main à la braguette, aussi privement que je fis à toy à ma première conoissance'.

<sup>36</sup> On these bearings, see the article of Kotler E., "La sexualité et ses désordres dans la *Confession du Sieur de Sancy* d'Agrippa d'Aubigné", in Pérouse G.A. – Goyet F. (eds.), *Ordre et désordre dans la civilisation de la renaissance* (Saint-Etienne: 1996).

after the public controversy with Jacques Davy Du Perron in 1600,<sup>37</sup> builds on the strength of that feeling of failure which held the Protestants after Henry IV's conversion. It accounts for the fact that many followed the king in a will to move forward, but it also suggests that, despite the obvious vanity of the venture, some kept trying to convince the Catholics – convince them or drag them along in their fall, because if Aubigné's irony is so amusing in his *Sancy*, it is because it is basically destructive. It is funny because it destroys, and it is funny therefore it destroys. The author mixes *ad hominem* satire, which is the coarsest and easiest to understand, with attempts at a more subtle form of irony requiring intellectual connivance with the reader, who might as well be upset to have been forced into it against his will. The blind superiority of the author, the self-assured winner who will not face facts, paradoxically allows uncovering the open wounds of a defeated man in a text that wavers between the sublime and sheer pettiness. Conversion is represented as proof of Sancy's cunning or – and it is never quite clear which accusation is the worst – of his stupidity. Behind his apostasy, Aubigné denounces every form of compromise, which makes the supposedly resilient rectitude of a spirit bend under the undulations of courage or will. Behind one conversion, all conversions to Catholicism are being denounced. In choosing *Sancy* as the narrator of the *Confession*, Agrippa d'Aubigné sets him as a spokesman *malgré lui* of all the Protestant polemicists who are trying to prove the superiority of the Calvinist doctrine over the Catholic faith, which is ruined by the falseness of conversion.

In the *Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy*, Agrippa d'Aubigné, by laying bare the full violence of his hatred, by making no compromise with *decorum* or even with truth, unveils the misery of the vanquished who has no other means to express himself but calumny and violence. He pushes irony to such a degree that it comes to taint the author himself. But in spite of it all, he shows integrity in his very violence. His will is not waned by the idea of a life of compromise. He has lost the support of the most powerful ones but he has nothing to blame

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<sup>37</sup> On these bearings, see Angebault C., “‘Que cest excès mesme de parole à peine nous peut exprimer’. Censure et anathème dans la controverse autour de l'Institution de l'Eucharistie de Philippe Du Plessis-Mornay (1598)”, in Bernard M., – Levesque M., *La Censure en France sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris – Seattle – Tübingen: 2009) 347–363. According to Schrenck, *L'Or et la boue* 332, Aubigné started writing the lampoon in 1597 and it took him quite a long time.

himself for. Therefore, his last battle, the swan song of one who knows he has lost and cannot bear it, has something sublime about it. It is on the eschatological level that Agrippa d'Aubigné, faithful to himself once more, expresses his certainty: all of the apostates have been punished by God, and their suffering conscience is the best judgement of their sins. The *Sancy* never ceases to emphasize the same belief. And irony, however violent and unfaithful it may be, allows re-establishing a certain form of truth. Sancy is shown to present the confession of his Catholic faith. We won't ask ourselves whether Sancy was sincere when he forswore, but here, Aubigné lets us hear a voice that had been broken within the very act of conversion. Sancy becomes, in spite of himself, the spokesman for a voice which cannot speak anymore because it constrained itself to silence. In this lies certainly the cruellest of all irony: tragic irony.

Sancy is taken as a scapegoat for all the apostates of the end of the sixteenth century. The *Confession catholique du sieur de Sancy* is representative, above all, of the general attitude of the zealous Protestants, who had to deal with the painful idea that all their hopes had been ruined by the conversion of Henry IV. But Aubigné could not blame the king that violently, so he chose Sancy. Depicting an apostate is depicting *the* apostate in a Protestant view: someone deprived of honour and intelligence, a miserable traitor doomed to be punished by God. The representation is efficient because of the violence of the denunciation, but the violence itself is aimless if everything still depends on God's will. Aubigné refuses to accept the fact that the Protestants have lost the war in France, and that the conversions cannot be stopped. He refuses to look at history as it is, and is stuck in a strategy of battle and controversies, as fake as these ones can be. He can never stop talking, and even if all the Protestants decide to convert themselves to follow the king, he is sure to be in the right place. He knows the Protestant party is dead, but he continues writing with all his verve, again and again. Therefore the *Sancy* has the beauty of a swan song: even death must be superb and sung out loud. The *Confession* will not change anything but it is only there to assert that some knew how to preserve their dignity when the others sold it out. The fight may be lost on earth, but the sky waits for the honourable.

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## THE CONVERSION OF CHRISTIAN II OF DENMARK IN ROMAN CATHOLIC DIPLOMATIC LITERATURE, 1530–1532

Federico Zuliani

Christian II of Denmark, after his flight from Denmark, became an early convert to Lutheranism in 1524. In 1530 he converted back to Catholicism, and attempted to reconquer his old kingdom in an unfortunate military expedition funded by his hostile brother-in-law Charles V. Christian was the first Lutheran prince ever to convert back to Catholicism, and his conversion had a strong symbolic value both for Rome and for the Empire. Despite this, it has been somewhat neglected in the English speaking world.<sup>1</sup> The present article seeks to rectify this omission, making use of the rich diplomatic material on the subject. In the first part I shall introduce Christian, his life and his religious experience, while in the second I shall analyse the particularities of his conversion as witnessed by the diplomatic sources, notably the fact that few believed its sincerity.

Having been the governor of Norway, Christian II of Oldenburg (1481–1559) succeeded his father John as King of Denmark in 1513.<sup>2</sup> Two years later he married Elisabeth of Habsburg,<sup>3</sup> the sister of Charles V, and thus linked himself to the most prominent family in Europe. His energetic policy left its mark on many aspects of Danish society. First, he strongly supported its cultural revival:<sup>4</sup> he re-founded the University of Copenhagen, or at least tried to reestablish it as an

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<sup>1</sup> The conversion has been studied from a different perspective by Martin Schwarz Lausten in his authoritative *Christian 2. mellem paven og Luther. Tro og politik omkring 'den røde konge' i eksiliet og i fangenskabet (1523–1559)* (Copenhagen: 1995) especially on pages 341–379.

<sup>2</sup> For an English biography of Christian, see Nordstrom B.J., “Christian II”, in Id. (ed.), *Dictionary of Scandinavian History* (Westport: 1986) 59–62.

<sup>3</sup> Bagge P., “Elisabeth (Isabela)”, in *Dansk biografisk leksikon*, 16 vols. (Copenhagen: 1979–1984) IV, 154–155, and, written from a Spanish and Catholic perspective, Grönvold M., “Isabel de España, hermana del emperador Carlos V, reina de Dinamarca, Noruega y Suecia”, *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 143 (1958) 147–153.

<sup>4</sup> Lausten M.S., *Die Reformation in Dänemark* (Heidelberg: 2008) 14–18.

institution of the new humanism,<sup>5</sup> sponsored the production of books,<sup>6</sup> and supported the cultural initiatives of the local Carmelites.<sup>7</sup> He also attempted a profound reform of the Danish Church, with the aim of strengthening his control over it; such a policy can be seen as part of a broader plan to weaken the nobility<sup>8</sup> – since almost all of the higher clergy was part of the aristocracy<sup>9</sup> – and support instead the emerging merchant class of Copenhagen and Malmö.<sup>10</sup> Today he is perhaps most well-known for his bloodthirsty policy in Sweden – which, due to the Union of Kalmar, he also ruled<sup>11</sup> – which culminated with the notorious bloodbath of Stockholm, an event that sounded the death-knell for Danish hegemony in Sweden.<sup>12</sup>

In 1523 the Danish nobility rebelled against Christian,<sup>13</sup> and in April of that year he was forced to escape to the nearby Netherlands.<sup>14</sup> He

<sup>5</sup> Lausten M.S., “Der Universität Kopenhagen und die Reformation”, in Grane L. (ed.), *University and Reformation* (Leiden: 1981) 101–103. The idea of a re-foundation ‘almost from scratch’ has been challenged by Jan Pinborg in “Danish Students 1450–1535 and the University of Copenhagen”, *Cahiers de l’Institut du Moyen-Âge grec et latin* 37 (1981) 98.

<sup>6</sup> Hørby K., “Humanist Profiles in the Danish Reform Movement”, in Grane L. – Hørby K. (eds.), *Die dänische Reformation vor ihrem internationalen Hintergrund / The Danish Reformation against its International Background* (Göttingen: 1990) 32 and 34–35. The idea that Christian commissioned a translation of Machiavelli’s *Il Principe* should, however, be reconsidered: Torresin G., “Un episodio della fortuna del Machiavelli in Danimarca”, *Revue Romande* 8 (1973) 304–313.

<sup>7</sup> Mesters G., “The Carmelite Province of Denmark 1410 – ca. 1540”, *Carmelus* 3 (1956) 228–229. For Christian and the Carmelities, with a special focus on the great Paul Helgesen: Valkner K., *Paulus Helie og Christiern II: Karmeliterkollegiets oppløsning* (Oslo: 1963).

<sup>8</sup> Lausten, *Die Reformation in Dänemark* 12–14.

<sup>9</sup> Grell O.P., “The Catholic church and its leadership”, in Id. (ed.), *The Scandinavian Reformation: From Evangelical Movement to Institutionalism of Reform* (Cambridge: 1995) 70–113. For a broader study of the situation of the Danish nobility: Dahlerup T., “Danmark”, in Christensen A.E. (ed.), *Den nordiske adel i senmiddelalderen. Struktur, funktioner og internordiske relationer* (Copenhagen: 1971) 45–80.

<sup>10</sup> For the two cities: Grell O.P., “The Emergence of Two Cities: The Reformation in Malmö and Copenhagen”, in Grane L. – Hørby K. (eds.), *Die dänische Reformation* 129–145.

<sup>11</sup> For the political situation in Scandinavia of the period, and its historical background: Schück H., “The political system” and Olesen J.E., “Inter-Scandinavian relations”, in Helle K. (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia. Volume I. Prehistory to 1520* (Cambridge: 2003) 679–709 and 710–770.

<sup>12</sup> Ericson Wolke L., *Stockholms blodbad* (Stockholm: 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Venge M., *Christian 2.s fald, spillet om magten i Danmark januar–februar 1523* (Odense: 1972).

<sup>14</sup> Christian was also welcomed by the Scots, although ‘they could not give him any help’, and his finances were poor. Beyer J.C., “King in Exile: Christian II and the Netherlands 1523–1531”, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 11 (1986) 205.



sought help from his wife's powerful relatives – not least because her dowry had not yet been completely paid.<sup>15</sup> The royal family<sup>16</sup> arrived in the Netherlands on the first of May;<sup>17</sup> their welcome was cold.<sup>18</sup> Margaret,<sup>19</sup> Elisabeth's aunt and then regent of the Netherlands,<sup>20</sup> still remembered that Christian had long preferred a mistress, Dyveke, to her niece.<sup>21</sup> During his first months in exile, Christian acted desperately to reclaim his kingdom,<sup>22</sup> especially when it became clear that his wife's family would not help him. He sought the aid of the German princes to form an army and invade Denmark, but when the rumour of his great treasure was revealed to be false, the army was dissolved.<sup>23</sup> He tried also to obtain the aid of Henry VIII, but in vain, mainly due to the opposition of Cardinal Wolsey.<sup>24</sup> In April 1524, with the mediation of Charles V, talks were organised at Hamburg between Christian, the new Danish King Frederick, the Hanseatic cities which supported the new monarch, and various other observers.<sup>25</sup> Christian was offered a pension to abdicate in favour of his son John, who would acquire the throne after Frederick's death, but this was refused. In his desperate search for money Christian visited the North of Germany with his wife, and it was during these journeys that they embraced the

<sup>15</sup> Beyer, "King in Exile" 208–209.

<sup>16</sup> Christian, Elisabeth and their three children: Christina, Dorothea and John.

<sup>17</sup> Lausten M.S., *Den hellige Stad Wittenberg. Danmark og Lutherbyen Wittenberg i reformationstiden* (Copenhagen: 2002) 53.

<sup>18</sup> An overview of the different reasons for Margaret's attitude can be found in Beyer, "King in Exile" 211–212.

<sup>19</sup> Although limited to her political figure, and ignoring her importance as patron of the arts, see Kooperberg L.M.G., *Margaretha van Oostenrijk, landvoogdes der Nederlanden (tot den Vrede van Kamerijk)* (Amsterdam: 1908) and Tamussino U., *Margarete von Österreich. Diplomatin der Renaissance* (Graz: 1995).

<sup>20</sup> Gorter-Van Royel L., "De regentessen van Karel V in de Nederlanden. Beeld en werkelijkheid", *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 110 (1997) 169–197.

<sup>21</sup> Lauring P., *Dronninger og andre kvinder i Danmarkshistorien* (Copenhagen: 1981) 30–35 and Hansen P.-E., *Kejser Karl V og det skandinaviske Norden, 1523–1544* (Copenhagen: 1943).

<sup>22</sup> For the situation in Denmark during these months, see Venge M., *Når vinden følger sig... spillet om magten i Danmark marts–december 1523* (Odense: 1977).

<sup>23</sup> Beyer, "King in Exile" 206.

<sup>24</sup> Lausten M.S., "The contradiction between evangelical faith and the political aims of the Danish exiled King Christian II with reference to his relations to King Henry VIII (1523–1559)", in Brohed I. (ed.), *Church and People in Britain and Scandinavia* (Lund: 1996) 113–118.

<sup>25</sup> Beyer, "King in Exile" 215–217 and Paschini P., "Un pordenonese nunzio papale nel secolo XVI. Gerolamo Rorario", *Memorie Storiche Forogiuliesi* 30 (1934) 172–173.

new Lutheran faith;<sup>26</sup> Christian in October 1523 in Wittenberg, Elisabeth in spectacular public fashion during the Second Imperial Diet of Nuremberg of 1524.<sup>27</sup>

Their conversion could not go unnoticed. The two monarchs organised their court – at which were present, among the few Catholics, a huge number of Lutheran counsellors and courtiers<sup>28</sup> – in Lier, a small city almost equidistant from Mechelen and Antwerp (both with significant Protestant circles) but also close to Leuven.<sup>29</sup> From here they aided and supported the local and regional Protestants.<sup>30</sup> As before in Denmark, Christian patronised the production of books, but now the texts were but exclusively pro-Lutheran. It was, in fact, by Christian's order that the humanist reformer Christian Pedersen<sup>31</sup> published a fresh Danish translation of the New Testament in 1529.<sup>32</sup> Here, in the introduction to Paul's Epistles, the King's new faith was strongly underlined.<sup>33</sup> Christian's patronage counted at least eight further books printed in Antwerp by Willem Vorsterman, in collaboration with Christian Pedersen, between 1529 and 1531:<sup>34</sup> these were intended not

<sup>26</sup> Lausten, *Den hellige Stad Wittenberg* 53–85.

<sup>27</sup> Lausten, *Christian* 2 74–92.

<sup>28</sup> An analysis of their court, and of its division among Catholics and Protestants, is given in Lausten, *Christian* 2 30–73.

<sup>29</sup> An important city for the presence of Scandinavian students. Ijsewijn J., "Humanistic Relations Between Scandinavia and the Low Countries", in Ekrem I. – Skaftø Jensen M. – Kraggerud E. (eds.), *Reformation and Latin Literature in Northern Europe* (Oslo: 1996) 4–11 and Jørgensen E., "Nordiske Studerende i Louvain", *Personal Historisk Tidsskrift* 8 Rk V (1926) 118–122.

<sup>30</sup> Lausten, "The contradiction" 112 and Id., *Christian* 2 171–186.

<sup>31</sup> About this figure, see in English: Petersen E., "Humanism and the Medieval Past: Christiernus Petri as a Humanist Scholar", in Schoeck R.J. (ed.), *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Bononiensis: Proceedings of the Fourth International Congress of Neo-Latin Studies* (Binghamton: 1985) 172–176. In Danish, meanwhile, see the classic: Brandt C.J., *Om Lunde-Kanniken Christiern Pedersen og hans Skrifter* (Copenhagen: 1882).

<sup>32</sup> An edition definitely better than the 1524 one: Hørby K., "Humanist Profiles" 35. A comparison of the two editions, along with a synthesis of the historical debate, is given in Riising A., "The book and the Reformation in Denmark and Norway, 1523–40", in Gilmont J.-F. (ed.), *The Reformation and the Book* (Aldershot: 1998) 437–439.

<sup>33</sup> Lausten, "The contradiction" 110–111.

<sup>34</sup> Kronenberg M.E., "De drukker van de Deensche boeken te Antwerpen (1529–1531) is Willem Vorsterman", *Het boek* 8 (1919) 1–8, together with its review Nielsen L., "Nye Oplysninger om Johan Hoochstratens Virksomhed", *Nordisk Tidsskrift för Bok- och Biblioteksväsen* 7 (1920) 39–40. In English: Johnston A.G. – Gilmont J.-F., "Printing and the Reformation in Antwerp", in Gilmont J.-F. (ed.), *The Reformation* 193–194 and 201.

only for Danish Lutheran *émigrés* in the Netherlands, but also for the faithful within Denmark.

Elisabeth died in 1526, provoking a serious controversy; it was widely asked if she had died a Lutheran, or if she had converted back to Catholicism on her deathbed.<sup>35</sup> The quarrel humiliated the Habsburgs, who increased their hostility to Christian and decided to take away his children.<sup>36</sup> The new hostility became especially evident with the persecution of the evangelical circle surrounding Hans Mikkelsen,<sup>37</sup> a councillor to the King, culminating with the execution of one member, William of Zwolle, in 1529.<sup>38</sup> Christian was now penniless, deprived of protection and of his closest fellows, enslaved to the will of his hostile relatives – almost a ‘stranger in the land of Egypt’.

### *History of a conversion*

On the eighth of February 1530, Christian wrote to Margaret with his desire to reconvert to Catholicism, even denying that he had ever been Lutheran: ‘although we have perhaps been denounced as adherents to the Lutheran sect in some respects, we declare and promise in this letter that we wish to maintain and demonstrate ourselves and all our men, and to be found by all, to be in the cause of the Catholic faith’.<sup>39</sup> In the same letter, moreover, Christian sought to reassure Margaret and the Emperor about his plans for the future:

When, with the help of the Caesarean Majesty [...], we are restored to our kingdoms and dominions, those same kingdoms, as well as all our secular and ecclesiastical subjects, in accordance with the aforementioned cause of the Catholic faith, will have to live, behave, and be ruled and governed following every will and desire of the orders of the Caesarean Majesty [...] and I shall grant an absolute help to those who diligently follow the

<sup>35</sup> Lausten, *Christian 2* 142–162.

<sup>36</sup> Lausten, “The contradiction” 111–112.

<sup>37</sup> Lausten, *Christian 2* 186–195.

<sup>38</sup> Lausten, *Christian 2* 195–211, and Fredericq P., “Sentence prononcée contre Guillaume van Zwolle par l’inquisiteur général des Pays-Bas (1529)”, *Bulletin de l’Académie Royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beux-Arts de Belgique* 30 (1895) 258–266.

<sup>39</sup> *Christian to Margaret*, Lier 8 February 1530, ‘quamquam forte delati sumus tanquam lutherane secte in aliquibus adherentes, nos his literis declaramus et promittimus, quod in hac causa catholice fidei nos ipsos et omnes nostros ita volumus intertenere, ostendere et ab omnibus inveniri’, *Christian II to Margaret of Austria*, Lier 8 February 1530, printed in Lanz K., *Staatspapiere zur Geschichte des Kaisers Karl V* (Stuttgart: 1845) 43.

cause of the Catholic faith, and the orders concerning it in our kingdoms and dominions, and where they discover an error, they will proceed to an appropriate correction and to the execution of our orders.<sup>40</sup>

The letter continues with a great number of guarantees and declarations of eternal faith and trust, even with the promise to help Ferdinand against 'the Turks, the Voivode and all of their protectors, accomplices and adherents'.<sup>41</sup> But after many years of militant Lutheranism, Christian's declaration was probably insufficient to convince the hostile Habsburgs, and so from the outset he emphasises the most concrete advantages to his change of confession. In the letter, he alludes to the spread of heresy in Scandinavia, presenting himself as a champion of orthodoxy, an implication that also lies behind his reference to the 'protectors, accomplices and adherents' of the Turks – in other words, the Evangelicals.<sup>42</sup> Besides, during the 1524 Hamburg discussions, Charles V had offered Christian a vassal's position in Scandinavia,<sup>43</sup> and it strikes me that such a possibility is suggested in Christian's reference to his 'secular and ecclesiastical subjects' in the passage quoted above.

Margaret invited Christian to address Charles directly.<sup>44</sup> He then moved to Innsbruck, where the Emperor had his temporary court, and on May 25 Lorenzo Campeggi,<sup>45</sup> then nuncio *apud Caesaream Majestatem*, wrote to Giovanni Salviati,<sup>46</sup> in Rome:

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<sup>40</sup> 'Preterea cum auxilio cesaree majestatis [...] ad regna et dominia nostra restituti fuerimus, debent eadem regna et subditi nostri omnes ecclesiastici atque seculares (quantum ad hanc predictam catholicæ fidei causam) vivere et se regere atque regi et gubernari ad omnimodam voluntatem et prescriptum mandatorum cesaree majestatis [...] et plenariam dare commissionem, qui hanc fidei catholicæ causam et circa eam mandata in regnis et dominiis nostris diligenter prosequantur, et ubi erratum invenerint, ad condignam emendationem atque executionem mandatorum procedant', *Christian II to Margaret of Austria*, Lier 8 February 1530, printed in Lanz, *Staatspapiere* 43–44.

<sup>41</sup> 'adversus Turcarum vires, vayvodam et omnes eorum fautores, complices ac adherentes', *Christian II to Margaret of Austria*, Lier 8 February 1530, printed in Lanz, *Staatspapiere* 44.

<sup>42</sup> The polemics against Luther's support for the Turks, which had begun already in 1518, right after the affixing of the 95 theses, had been revitalised in these very months by the publication of Luther's *Vom Kriege wider die Türken* (On War against the Turks). Forell G.W., "Luther and the war against the Turks", *Church History* 14 (1945) 257–259.

<sup>43</sup> Beyer, "King in Exile" 216–217.

<sup>44</sup> Beyer, "King in Exile" 223.

<sup>45</sup> Lorenzo Campeggi (1474–1539) was a diplomat of great experience, especially in German matters. Skalweit S., "Lorenzo Campeggi", in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 73 vols. (Rome: 1960–) XVII, 454–462.

<sup>46</sup> Giovanni Salviati (1490–1553), at that time protonotary apostolic of the Papal court. Hurtubise P., *Une famille-témoin: les Salviati* (Vatican City: 1985).

The King of Denmark is here with Caesar, who, since he desired to bring him back to the right path, wanted me to confess him and give him absolution: but he heard from me that it could not be done, since the King had fallen not just into the errors of heresy but into others as well, as has been said, and as Your Lordship knows – errors which require a better and greater physician. His Majesty, however, has entreated me to ask of His Holiness [i.e., the Pope] a letter to grant me the faculty to absolve him *a quocunque crimine in foro conscientiae tantum iniuncta sibi penitentia etc.*, something which, when necessary, must be done in public; nevertheless, I can commute it differently, as it will seem appropriate, so send a letter for the satisfaction of His Majesty immediately.<sup>47</sup>

Four days later Campeggi wrote again to Rome; the second letter is in many respects a conclusion to the first, and so the two deserve to be read together:

among other things I have already told you about the King of Denmark, whom His Majesty [i.e. Charles] has returned *ad cor et saniolem intellectum*. The King has been confessed by Sir Gioan Fabri, who has related marvels to me about his contrition and tears, and attested that Christian sinned much more when seduced by others than by his own malice. I have given him [i.e., Fabri] all the authority that I have, because he absolved him *in foro conscientiae*, seeing that his contrition was so great, and I believe that he has been absolved. However, for a greater certainty about his conscience it would be appropriate for Your Lordship to send me a letter of great authority *in foro conscientiae* [...] I do believe that it would be very useful and very welcome to Their Majesties [i.e., Charles and Ferdinand], who are very fond of the children of their sister [Elisabeth]. I also enclose some written statements by Christian, which he gave me for this purpose, and in which he promises eternal obedience to the apostolic see. So good is the information given me by Fabri that I think it would be of great advantage to the Catholic faith in the Nordic countries for him to be restored to the throne, either throughout or in part. The present leaders are tyrants and, as far as I understand, forsaken in their heresies.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> 'Il Re di Dacia è qui con Cesare, il qual desideroso che si reduca al dritto camino, voleva che io in confessione lo ascoltassi, et assolvesse: ma inteso da me non potersi fare, per esser caduto non solo in questi errori di heresia, ma in altri come sin dice, et come sa Vostra Signoria che hanno bisogno di migliore et più gran medico. Mi ha sua Maestà pregato, che io ne preghi sua Sanctità che per breve mi concedi la facultà di poterlo assolvere a quocunque crimine in foro conscientiae tantum iniuncta sibi penitentia etc. la qual quando necessario fusso ad esser publica, possi io nondimeno convertirla in altro modo, secundo si vedrà oportuno, et mandar subito il breve a satisfatione di Sua Maestà', *Campeggi to Salviati*, Innsbruck 25 May 1530, printed in Müller G. (ed.), *Nuntiaturberichte aus Deutschland 1533–1559. Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1530–1531 und Nuntiatur Girolamo Aleandros 1531* (Tübingen: 1963) 44.

<sup>48</sup> 'tra l'altre cose gli disse del re di Dacia, qual Sua Maestà havea ridotto ad cor et saniolem intellectum. Il qual si è confessato a m. Gioan Fabri che mi ha referito

The first thing that appears from these letters is the Emperor's role in the affair, and his desire to have the situation solved as soon as possible. It is indicative that in his first letter Campeggi asked for a letter to absolve Christian *in foro conscientiae*, while in the second, only four days later, he has already absolved him. Such a forcing of canon law can be seen only as the result of Imperial pressure.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the Emperor demonstrated a great desire to obtain absolution for his brother-in-law, and Campeggi constantly reiterates the Emperor's position. The letter that Rome should send is clearly said to be 'to satisfy His Majesty'. Charles himself had no sympathy whatsoever for Christian, and such a strong commitment may appear strange. Perhaps we can adduce familial reasons, since Campeggi emphasises Charles' affection for his nephew. But this was not the only reason, as is shown by the start of the second letter: 'the King of Denmark, whom his Majesty has returned *ad cor et saniozem intellectum*', that is, to his heart and to a healthier state of mind. Charles evidently believed that he had been the one to convert Christian, and as such counted it as personal victory. Imperial pressures were so strong that if in the first letter the nuncio denied the absolution, in the second he was forced to admit that he had given all his 'authority', since the King had already been absolved. Campeggi, moreover, reiterated Charles' name and title to clarify the urgency of the request.

Christian's case was twice discussed in the consistory in Rome, first on the third of June and again on the sixth.<sup>50</sup> The Pope's acceptance of Christian was communicated in his first, informal letter to the Emperor on the third: Clement VII seemed to be touched by Christian's conversion, but the political aspect of the situation was also clear to him:

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mirabilia della contritione et lachrime et attestava che più tosto sedutto da altri che per propria malitia ha peccato. Io li ho dato questa authorità che ho, perché lo assolve in foro conscientie, vista questa tanta sua contritione, et credo l'habbi assoluto. Pur per maggior securità della conscientia sua sarà al proposito che Vostra Signoria mi indirici un breve de auctorità amplia in foro conscientie [...] Penso gioverà molto et sarà gratissimo a queste Maestà, quali per li figliuoli ha della loro sorella non li ponno mancare. Et con questa li mando alcuni trattati soi havuti da lui a questo effetto, qual promette sempre eser ubediente alla sede apostolica. Tanta è la bona informatione che mi dà il prefato Fabri che penso sarà al proposito della fede Catholica in quelli regni ch'el sia restituito in tutto o in parte. Quelli che al presente reggono sono tyranni et quanto intendo perdutoissimi in queste heresie', *Campeggi to Salviati*, Innsbruck 29 May 1530, printed in Müller (ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1530–1531*, 48.

<sup>49</sup> For the problem of this kind of absolution: Brambilla E., *La giustizia intollerante. Inquisizione e tribunali confessionali in Europa (secoli IV–XVIII)* (Rome: 2006) 55–61.

<sup>50</sup> *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, 22 vols. (Oslo: 1847–1995) XVII, 1189–1190.

'I can hardly express with what pleasure and spiritual tenderness I have heard that the king of Denmark is one of the first brought back to the Church of God by Your Majesty's authority, and I rejoice for his example will be of value to innumerable others'.<sup>51</sup> The official pardon, however, had a while to wait, for it became the subject of much discussion, and much tension, between Rome and the Imperial court, with Campeggi caught in the middle.

The problem is raised already in a letter by Salviati to Campeggi on the fifth of June, mostly on other topics; the passage on Christian is short but prominent, coming at the very start. He informs Campeggi of the Pope's gladness at Christian's contrition, but stresses the gravity of the accusations against the King;<sup>52</sup> for this reason, Clement has decided to involve the consistory in his decision on the official absolution.<sup>53</sup> Another letter from Salviati, a few days later, explains the situation in its entirety. It will be worth quoting this at length:

I have already told Your Most Reverend Lordship that, concerning the form of the absolution of the King of Denmark, since it is such a serious matter, Our Lord deemed that it should be discussed in the consistory, exactly as happened, and concerning the absolution from the sin of heresy there was no doubt at all that we should accept him back *ad gremium Ecclesiae*, and we thank God that upon his first arrival in Germany, His Majesty had already begun to deal with the situation there. But concerning the other excesses of that King, and because he had those seven bishops burnt alive after inviting them to eat with him, it seemed to the Most Reverend Lords that the cruelty of this case demanded a great satisfaction of the Church's honour, to whose opprobrium such a crime was committed; and that the King, having shown such devotion to Your Most Reverend Lordship, writes not only that he would not object to any condition of his absolution, but even that he should be delighted to offer some demonstrations of his good will and contrition. For all these reasons it was decided that it would be very convenient if he could come here in person to be absolved, and moreover to give some satisfactions to God

<sup>51</sup> 'non potrei dirlle con quanto piacere, e tenerezza d'animo habbia udito, cheil re di Danimarc sia de' primi dall'autorità Di V. Maestà ridotto alla Chiesa di Dio, e mi rallegro, perché l'esempio suo valerà appresso d'infiniti altri', *Pope Clemens VII to Charles V*, Rome 3 June 1530, published in Girolamo Ruscelli, *Delle lettere di principi, le quali o si scrivono da principi, o a principi, o ragionando di principi*, 3 vols. (Venice: Francesco Ziletti, 1581) II, 194v.

<sup>52</sup> 'essendo cose gravi come sono', *Salviati to Campeggi*, Rome 5 June 1530, published in Müller (ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1530–1531* 52.

<sup>53</sup> 'del modo da tenere nell'absolution sua, fu parlato in consistorio', *Salviati to Campeggi*, Rome 5 June 1530, published in Müller (ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1530–1531* 52.

to eradicate his sin etc. After a long discussion it seemed however to Our Lordship that, because the King is currently planning to reconquer his kingdom with the support of the Emperor, it could be very inconvenient for him to come here, and that therefore absolution might be granted him, on condition that he *infra triennium teneretur venire Romam* and that, moreover, he should build an hospital, or another pious institution, in memory of the penitence of his own sins. Finally, because His Holiness knows that you, and His Caesarean Majesty still more, wish only to serve God, and for the honour of the Apostolic See, it was resolved to send Your Most Reverend Lordship a letter which may absolve him in three different ways, as you can see, so that you can use what you consider best, after discussing it with His Caesarean Majesty [...] There is nothing which His Holiness will not do to help the very holy will of the Caesarean Majesty, since he knows he has no other purpose but to serve God. Your Most Reverend Lordship, in whatever way that you deem best, will be glad to show the Caesarean Majesty that by helping [Christian] recover his previous dignity, as the Church is doing, he may obtain a great advantage by recognising his mistakes, as King will do. However, because to His Majesty and to Your Most Reverend Lordship, who are *in facto*, it may appear otherwise, and that it is not worth seeking any of the things we have discussed, His Holiness trusts to whatever you and the Caesarean Majesty decide to do.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> 'Dissi ad Vostra Signora Reverendissima che della forma dell'absolutione del Re di Dacia per esser materia grave pareva ad Nostro Signore si dovesse consultare in consistorio, come s'è fatto, et quanto all'absolutione della heresia non è stato dubio alcuno che non dovesse volentieri accogliersi ritornando ad gremium Ecclesiae, et ringrat[iar] Dio che nel primo arrivar della Maestà Sua in Germania havesse dato tal principio al rassettar di quelle cose. Ma per li altri eccessi di quel Re, et per haver fatto brusciar vivi quelli sette vescovi, invitati a mangiar seco, pareva ad questi Signori Reverendissimi, che l'acerbità di quel caso ricercasse qualche satisfattion dell'honor della chiesa in opprobrio della quale fu commesso quello eccesso, et che quel Re riconosciutosi con quella divotione che Vostra Signora Reverendissima scrive non solo non s'havesse a sentir gravato d'alcuna conditione che se li mettesse in l'absolutione, ma dovesse haver piacere di far qualche segnalata dimonstratione del buono animo et contrition sua, et così si discorse che converria che havesse ad venir personalmente qui ad farsi absolvere, et in oltre dare a Dio qualche satisfattione per cancellare il peccato etc. Essendosi discorso assai, parve ad Nostro Signore che stando hora il Re per attendere col favor dell'Imperatore a recuperare il suo Regno, dovesse tornarli molto incommodo il venir qua, et che però potesse concederseli l'absolutione, imponendoli che *infra triennium teneretur venire Romam*, et di più facesse come saria un hospitale o qualche altra opera pia in memoria della penitentia sua delli errori commessi, et alla fine sapendo Sua Santità che lei non può tanto volere per il servitio di Dio et honor della sede apostolica, che la Maestà Cesarea non ne voglia molto più, s'è risoluto di mandare ad Vostra Signoria Reverendissima il breve della facultà d'absolverlo in tre modi come essa vederà, affinché possi usare quale le piace come con la Maestà Cesarea risolverà con la quale havendo discorso il tutto [...] ne sarà cosa nella quale Sua Beatitudine manchi per aiutare il Santissimo proposito della Maestà Cesarea, che sa che non ha altro obiecto che il servitio di Dio. Vostra Signoria Reverendissima con



This letter is of great importance because it illuminates several unclear aspects of the situation – first of all, the ‘greater sin’ imputed to Christian. The story of Christian killing the bishops was untrue, but not completely – different facts seem to have been confused and conflated. The general reference must be the Stockholm bloodbath which was carried out after a banquet. When in Stockholm, Christian ordered the death of the anti-unionist bishops of Skara and Strängnäs, but two other Swedish bishops, Otto of Västerås and Arvid of Åbo, were also killed later because of Christian.<sup>55</sup> The bishops, however, were not burnt but decapitated; Salviati may have been thinking of Didrik Slagheck, the Archbishop of Lund, whom Christian executed, ostensibly for heresy, in 1521. The errors may seem slight, but the letter demonstrates *the* problem of Rome’s relationship with Northern Europe: the difficulties of communication.

The same appears from other, previous letters. When Campeggi wrote to Rome, as we have seen, that ‘the present leaders are tyrants and, as far as I understand, forsaken in their heresies’, we must ask who gave him such information. Gustav Vasa had indeed broken with Rome in 1527, but Frederick, the new King of Denmark, remained a Catholic. Furthermore, the Church was so strong in Denmark that, to introduce Lutheranism a war was required in 1535, generally known as *Grevens feide*, ‘the war of the duke’. We can only speculate as to the source of Campeggi’s views, but they probably stemmed from the Danish *émigrés* on the continent, since these were the only ones who were both knowledgeable about the Nordic situation, and connected to Christian, if not members of his court. It is telling that, already in his first letter to Margaret, Christian alludes to the possible loss of the Northern kingdoms to the Catholic faith, and that Campeggi in his own remark includes the expression ‘quanto intendo’. For its information, Rome was in debt to the same people it had to judge. Is it difficult to imagine that Christian deliberately exaggerated Frederick’s

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quel modo che a lei parerà sarà contenta mostrare alla Maestà Cesarea che aiutando lei come fa la chiesa a ritornar nella prima dignità sua, può con l’exempio del riconoscersi che farà questo Re profittarli molto, ma perché alla Maestà Sua et Vostra Signoria Reverendissima, che sono in facto può parere altrimenti, et che non convenghì ricercare alcuna delle predette cose, Sua Beatitudine se ne rimette ad quello che la Maestà Cesarea et lei accorderanno di fare’, *Salviati a Campeggi*, Rome 14 June 1530, published in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* 1190–1192.

<sup>55</sup> Grell, “The Catholic Church” 101.

Lutheranism to convince Charles and the Pope of the need for a military régime change?

Probably the letter's most important revelation, however, is the political aspect of the conversion, of which Rome was well aware – one can 'obtain a great advantage by recognising [one's] mistakes'. Rome clearly had great expectations for its conversions, both in terms of propaganda and as a result of Christian's military exploits, for which the Pope temporarily exempted the King from a journey of penitence.<sup>56</sup> Christian's importance was also due to his status as 'German';<sup>57</sup> this can be seen in greater clarity with reference to the Pope's aforementioned letter to Charles V, where the King's conversion is described as part of a broader plan to 'purge Germany of all the heresies that flourish there'.<sup>58</sup> For the Pope, in other words, the affair was bound up with nothing less than the Holy Roman Empire; the letter therefore shows us why Rome placed such a great value on the conversion, to the point of bending its own ecclesiastical policies.

But the problems were far from over. Campeggi wrote to Rome again on 26 June and 29 July; it is clear from these letters not only that the pardon had not yet been formalised, but also, more interestingly, that Charles did not trust Christian and believed his conversion to be insincere. Both the texts are incredibly clear on this point:

it seems to me, following what His Majesty has told me, that he has no great trust that he [Christian] is a good man [...] he judges that it would be best to treat him as benignly as possible, so as to strengthen his resolve: although His Majesty has little hope for it, or that he will recover his kingdom<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Rome invited Christian to build a hospital. We have no clear sources but it may have been affiliated with the Ospedale di Santo Spirito in Sassia, a German institution, strongly connected with the Oldenburgs, which offered assistance both to pilgrims and the sick. De Angelis P., *L'Ospedale di Santo Spirito in Saxia*, 2 vols. (Rome: 1960–1962) II, 113 and 601–602.

<sup>57</sup> This identification of Denmark as a German territory should not surprise us, for this classification remained common in Italy until the work of the Magnus brothers. This topic I have studied for my MA dissertation (*The Perception of Danes in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, The Warburg Institute, 2008–2009) and I hope to publish the results of my research soon.

<sup>58</sup> 'purgar la Germania dall'heresie che vi sono', *Pope Clement VII to Charles V*, Rome 3 June 1530, published in Ruscelli, *Delle lettere* 194v.

<sup>59</sup> 'parmi, secondo che Sua Maestà mi disse, che non confida molto che sia buono [...] iudica la Maestà sua che al proposito sia andar con lui più benignamente che si può, per confirmarlo in buon volere: benché e di questo, et del recuperar del Regno sua Maestà poco ne speri' *Campeggi to Salviati*, Augsburg 26 June 1530, published

and

concerning the absolution of the King of Denmark it seems to me that His Majesty desires it but, at the same time, little believes him to be good, and regards him as a frivolous and untrustworthy man; however he still wants the letter of absolution to arrive, after which the decision will have been made which seems best.<sup>60</sup>

The long years of intimacy between Charles and Christian seem to re-emerge here. Charles' memoirs do not even mention Christian,<sup>61</sup> an omission which suggests a *damnatio memoriae*, and which demonstrates his very negative opinion of his brother-in-law. Such a silence is still more deafening if we consider the space he gives to Christian's son John.<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless, what is most surprising in Campeggi's letters is Charles' lack of faith in the military expedition which he himself was about to fund.

The problem, not just of the absolution in itself, but of its ceremony, remains present in the correspondence between Rome and Campeggi. Campeggi wrote to Rome on August 11,<sup>63</sup> from Augsburg – where

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in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* 1192. The ciphered original, is in Archivio Vaticano, Germania, vol. 54, fols. 27r–34v.

<sup>60</sup> 'della absolutione del Re di Datia, a me pare che Sua Maestà la desidera, ma che etiandio poco confidi di lui che habbia ad esser buono, et iudica lo piu tosto leggiero et homo da non farne molto fondamento pur desidera che'l breve venga della absolutione, et che poi si pigliara quella resolutione che parrà migliore' *Campeggi a Salviati*, Augsburg 29 July 1530, published in Müller (ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1530–1531* 92 with the exception of a part, from which this passage is taken, which is published in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* 1196.

<sup>61</sup> *Treslado do papel, que está em o principio desta historia escrito per mão propria do Emperador Carlos V em a lingua Castelhana, o qual papel sua Mag. mandou d'Alemanha com a mesma historia á El Rey D. Philippe seu filho, que então era Principe de Hespanha*, published in Morel-Fatio A. (ed.), *Historiographie de Charles-Quint. Première partie suivie des Mémoires de Charles-Quint. Text portugais et traduction française* (Paris: 1913) 184–334. An introduction to the text is given in the same volume at the pages 157–180.

<sup>62</sup> *Treslado do papel* 204. Charles was indeed very fond of the child, as Campeggi pointed out to Salviati in a letter written the day after the Prince's death: 'the Prince of Denmark, the only son of King Christian, died recently to the very great sadness and sorrow of His Majesty, who loved him as if he were his own son', 'Il principe di Danemarch, unico figliuolo maschio al re Christierno, morse questi giorni di flusso, con grandissima noia et dispiacer di Sua Maestà, la quale l'amava come figliuolo', *Campeggi to Salviati*, Regensburg 16 August 1532, published in Müller G. (ed.), *Nuntiaturberichte aus Deutschland 1533–1559. Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1532 und Nuntiatur Girolamo Aleandros 1532* (Tübingen: 1969) 419.

<sup>63</sup> *Campeggi to Salviati*, Augsburg 11 August 1530, published in Müller (ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1530–1531* 110 and in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* 1197. On the Diet of Augsburg and the role of Campeggi there: Müller G., "Kardinal

Christian had moved – on August 20,<sup>64</sup> September 13,<sup>65</sup> and October 14,<sup>66</sup> begging for instruction under Imperial pressure. The Pope replied on October 13 – the letter must have arrived after Campeggi's final missive – in an attempt to put an end to the matter:

If, with the faculty that Your Most Reverend Lordship possesses, you can absolve the King of Denmark, feel free to do and decide as you please, and Our Lord will be glad because when he had presented the case of the absolution to the Most Reverend Lords, he had back so many different answers that he became indecisive. His Holiness, however, has great faith in Your Lordship's prudence and he will judge well whatever you decide.<sup>67</sup>

The letter demonstrates an interesting hostility within Rome, among the cardinals, where it is likely that many disapproved of giving so well-known a heretic an easy pardon. The letter does not say that it was probably Cardinal Paolo de Cesis who had the greatest animosity to Christian, with whom he had fought at length for the assignment of the rich archbishopric of Lund.<sup>68</sup>

Campeggi, now acting as plenipotentiary, twice communicated to Salviati<sup>69</sup> his desire to solve the question once and for all, but Christian

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Lorenzo Campeggio, *die Römische Kurie und der Augsburger Reichstag von 1530*, *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 52 (1971–1972) 133–152.

<sup>64</sup> Campeggi to Salviati, Augsburg 20 August 1530, published in Müller (ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1530–1531* 116 and in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* 1197, where it is erroneously marked, however, 8 September.

<sup>65</sup> Campeggi a Salviati, Augsburg 13 September 1530, published in Müller (ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1530–1531* 129 and in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* 1197–1198.

<sup>66</sup> Campeggi to Salviati, Augsburg 14 October 1530, published in Müller (ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1530–1531* 151 and in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* 1198.

<sup>67</sup> 'Se con la facultà che Vostra Signoria Reverendissima ha lei può satisfar in la absolution del Re di Datia facci et deliberi lei come più le piace che Nostro Signore resterà contento a quello che lei hora exequito questa absolutione posta in consulta di questi Signori Reverendissimi ha havute opinione tanto diverse che di qui è nata l'irresolutione di Nostro Signore la cui Santità confida tanto in la prudentia di Vostra Signoria Reverendissima che ciò che lei ne delibererà giudicherà ben fatto', *Salviati to Campeggi*, Rome 13 October 1530, published in Müller (ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1530–1531* 148, with the exception of the part from which this passage is taken, published in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* 1198.

<sup>68</sup> Johannesson G., *Den skånska kyrkan och reformationen* (Lund: 1947) 23–61. De Cesis is shown to have been active in both the consistories where the pardon was discussed, *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* 1189–1190.

<sup>69</sup> Campeggi to Salviati, Augsburg 25 October 1530, published in Müller (ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1530–1531* 161 and in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* 1200 and *Campeggi to Salviati*, Augsburg 30/31 October 1530, published in Müller

had already left the Diet, and for this reason we have no record of the formal application for forgiveness. The Danish King would appear once more, and for the last time, in the diplomatic correspondence only a few months later.

### *Epilogue*

In 1531 Charles V finally gave Christian enough money for a mercenary army to conquer Denmark,<sup>70</sup> but the expedition was not fortunate. Landing in Norway, where Christian, still popular, could garner the support of the local Catholic bishops,<sup>71</sup> the army was defeated, and Christian taken prisoner at Sønderborg Castle; in 1546 he formally renounced his claim to the throne, in favour of Christian III, and was transferred to Kalundborg Castle with an annual pension, where he remained until his death in 1559.<sup>72</sup> The expedition was the last time when his name appeared in the Roman diplomatic documents. Both Campeggi, who had followed the Emperor to the Netherlands, and Girolamo Aleandro, who was the legate there, kept Rome informed about the expedition, its preparations, and its tragic result.

The first news of the missions arrived in September, when Campeggi informed Rome of Christian's presence in the duchies of 'Gheldria et Phrisia',<sup>73</sup> preparing for his expedition. One month later, the nuncio communicated Christian's attempts to build an army.<sup>74</sup> In the same letter, perhaps for the first time, the diplomat displayed an optimism about the mission's success: 'many believe' he wrote, 'that he will succeed in regaining his kingdom, because the population and the clergy are very displeased by the other [i.e. Frederick], who – as Your

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(ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1530–1531* 169 and in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* 1200.

<sup>70</sup> Beyer, "King in Exile" 206.

<sup>71</sup> Lausten, *Christian 2* 380–391.

<sup>72</sup> Kirby D., *Northern Europe in the Early Modern Period: The Baltic World, 1492–1772* (London – New York: 1990) 63.

<sup>73</sup> *Campeggi to Salviati*, Brussels 29 September 1531, published in Müller (ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1530–1531* 316 with the exception of the part from which this passage is taken, published in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* 1203.

<sup>74</sup> *Campeggi to Salviati*, Brussels 19/22 October 1531, published in Müller (ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1530–1531* 359.

Highness knows – is *lutheranissimo*'.<sup>75</sup> Once again, we do not know Campeggi's source of Danish news, and it is unclear if Campeggi genuinely believed in the expedition, or in the King about whom he had written so many negative letters.

By the seventh of November, Christian's defeat was already assumed.<sup>76</sup> Rome was kept informed of Christian's plans by Aleandro only a few days later.<sup>77</sup> The information was obviously slow-moving, and on the fourteenth, Campeggi informed Rome that 'we still have no news about the King of Denmark and his successes, and the weather is not favourable to news on the subject'.<sup>78</sup> The weather, indeed, was the biggest reason for Christian's failure: his navy faced shipwreck, after a terrible storm, and only a small part of the original army reached Norway. After November there is no correspondence until six months later, when Campeggi, now in Regensburg, brought the subject up again, now utterly despondent:

News has arrived that the Imperial cities of Lübeck, Hamburg, and others close to the Danish border, are sending a great number of troops, it is said 8,000 soldiers in support of the new King of Denmark, the Duke of Holstein [i.e. Frederick], against the expelled King Christian, who is currently in Norway with around 2,000 soldiers, the remainder of those 7,000 with whom he sailed hence. Some of them perished by shipwreck, others from an illness which is worse than the plague and which kills within a few hours. And because the most important fortresses of the country are still held by the new King, and because Christian lacks the means to feed his men, we worry that he could die together with his men, the remnants of those Landsknechte who went to Italy and sacked Rome.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> 'molti credeno che gli succederà di recuperare il regno per la mala contentezza hanno li populi et clero di quello altro, qual come sa Vostra Signoria è Lutheranissimo' *Campeggi to Salviati*, Brussels, 19/22 October 1531, published in Müller (ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1530–1531* 359.

<sup>76</sup> *Aleandro to Salviati*, Brussels 6 November 1531, is partially published in Müller (ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1530–1531* 371. Christian had left the 26 October 1531, from Medemblik, Beyer, "King in Exile" 225.

<sup>77</sup> *Aleandro to Salviati*, Brussels 14 November 1531, is partially published in Müller (ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1530–1531* 393–394.

<sup>78</sup> 'del Re di Danimarca non si ha ancora nova de suoi successi et li tempi sono molto contrarii a poter venir nova in qua', *Campeggi to Salviati*, Brussels 14 November 1531, is published in Müller (ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1530–1531* 389 with the exception of the part from which this passage is taken, published in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* 1205.

<sup>79</sup> 'Qui s'ha nova che le città imperiali di Lubecca et Amburgo, et altre alli confini della Datia, mandano buon numero di gente, et dicono de 8 000 fanti in sussidio del re novo di Datia, alias duca d'Holtsatia, contra il re Christierno alias expulso, qual hora

Christian's definitive failure is communicated to Rome in August; 'there are some letters from Lübeck that say that King Christian is being held in prison'.<sup>80</sup> As a final insult this news was communicated to Rome alongside the death of John, Christian's elder son.<sup>81</sup> At the same time, Rome learnt not just of Christian's failure and imprisonment, but also of the end of the royal branch of the Oldenburg dynasty. Denmark was now a lost cause to the Catholic Church, in the hands of a prince who was *lutheranissimo*, and with nobody else to claim the throne.

### Conclusion

Christian's conversion offers many different points of interest. The first is that the matter was not so much religious, as political: Campeggi's letters attest to a widespread distrust in the sincerity of the conversion, and indeed in Christian himself. This can probably be attributed in part to bad timing, as it occurred in a very early stage of the Protestant Reformation – Luther was still alive, many countries now Protestant were still loyal to Rome (not only England, but almost all the Scandinavian countries and the majority of German states), the 1541 Diet of Regensburg was still to come, and the Church still hoped that the schism would prove temporary. For all these reasons, the formal, politically-motivated conversion of a monarch would have been preferable to any conversion based on sincere belief. A second point of interest is its demonstration of the difficulties in communication faced by Rome and Northern Europe during this period as well as the German dimension of the conversion from a Roman point of view.

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si ritrova in Norvegia con circa 2 000 fanti, ch'è il resto de 7 000, con quali si pose in mare, parte è perita per naufragio et parte da una infirmità, quale è peggio di peste che in poche hore expedita. Et porché le fortezze d'importanza sono anche in poter del novo re et a lui manca il modo di sostener quella gente, si dubita che non perisca con dette genti, quali sono delle reliquie delli Lanz che furono in Italia et a danni di Roma', *Campeggi to Salviati*, Regensburg 11 May 1532, printed in Müller (ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1532* 213.

<sup>80</sup> 'ci sono lettere di Lubecca che'l detto re Christierno è rimasto in prigione', *Campeggi to Salviati*, Regensburg 16 August 1532, printed in Müller (ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1532* 419.

<sup>81</sup> *Campeggi to Salviati*, Regensburg 16 August 1532. The news was also given one day previously by another diplomat, *Aleandro to Sanga*, Regensburg 15 August 1532. Both printed in Müller (ed.), *Legation Lorenzo Campeggios 1532* 419 and 413.

The story provokes a number of questions which have still to be answered. When Christian was captured, he received a consolatory letter from Luther, who, as has been observed elsewhere,<sup>82</sup> was unaware of the King's second conversion. Why, then, did Charles V not advertise that conversion more aggressively? The most probable answer is that he trusted neither Christian nor his new faith. But why, then, did he endorse the conversion and fund Christian's attempted *coup*? Perhaps he had nothing to lose – if Christian had succeeded he would have obtained a future kingdom for his beloved Catholic nephew; if not, Charles would have disposed of an untrustworthy and embarrassing relative.

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<sup>82</sup> Lausten, *Christian* 2 392–399.



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‘THY VERY ESSENCE IS MUTABILITY’:  
RELIGIOUS CONVERSION IN EARLY MODERN  
ENGLISH DRAMA, 1558–1642

Lieke Stelling

Early modern England witnessed an unprecedented increase in the number of religious conversions. Elizabeth I’s reign was preceded by 30 years of instability in religious national identity, starting with Henry VIII’s break with Rome, which was followed by national and numerous personal conversions to and from Catholicism. Interreligious contacts were growing significantly due to the rise of voyages of discovery and global commerce, often triggering proselytism, and the massive Ottoman Empire proved a magnet for impoverished fortune hunters who were eager to relinquish their Christian faith and ‘turn Turk’ in order to turn over a new leaf, or so it was suggested in myriad travel reports and cautionary sermons.<sup>1</sup> ‘Flux in religion’, Michael Questier notes, ‘was the norm rather than the exception in religious experience, actually expected rather than regarded with astonishment’.<sup>2</sup> That is not to say that conversion was looked upon without anxiety or suspicion. ‘Accusations of inconsistency [...] were leveled at every convert’.<sup>3</sup>

As one of the major public sites in which these issues were explored and questioned or confirmed, the early modern theatre helps us to investigate how the public’s understanding of conversion was formed. Biographical texts and poetry generally portray religious conversion from the perspective of converts themselves. In so doing, the authors of these sources provide a more positive image of early modern conversion than playwrights, who are less interested in the self-asserting or self-defining aspects of religious change than in the emotions conversion evokes in witnesses and the social responses to conversion. Using

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Vitkus D., *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean 1570–1630* (New York: 2003) 82–83.

<sup>2</sup> Questier M., *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580–1625* (Cambridge: 1996) 206.

<sup>3</sup> Questier, *Conversion* 56.

the freedom to explore religious conversion in a wide range of contexts, early modern playwrights shed light on the ways in which both its denominational and undenominational variant was experienced by contemporary audiences.

The past 20 years or so have witnessed a fruitful interest in early modern stage representations of proselytes and changes of faith, but what is lacking in critical analyses is a comprehensive investigation of the concept of religious conversion itself. That is, these studies are very specific, focusing exclusively on conversions between Christianity and another religion, primarily either Judaism or Islam, and using conversion as a means to gain insight into early modern English concepts of Judaism or Islam and their adherents.<sup>4</sup> In addition, they take into consideration only a limited number of relevant plays. In what follows, by contrast, I will map a number of unmistakable, though surprising, cross-religious patterns in the way conversion is depicted on the early modern English stage that have been overlooked precisely because of previous selective approaches. For this purpose, and due to the limited scope of this article, the focus of my analysis will be on play texts and not on contextual contemporary prose. Also, I will distinguish between what I term 'spiritual' and 'interfaith conversion'. This distinction is analogous to the difference between spiritual religion, the private and mystical experience of divine presence, and denominational faith, religion in its institutionalized, politicized form, captured in official dogmas and doctrines. I use the term spiritual conversion to refer to a turn of the soul towards God, or the rejection of sin in favour of the pursuit of a life of godliness, that does not necessarily or explicitly involve the embrace or rejection of a specific religious denomination. Likewise, I deploy the term 'interfaith conversion' in the sense of the exchange of one denomination or religion for another.

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<sup>4</sup> Many of the following works devote at least a chapter on conversion on the early modern English stage: between Islam and Christianity: Matar N., *Islam in Britain, 1558–1685* (Cambridge: 1998); Fuchs B., *Mimesis and Empire: The New World, Islam and European Identities* (Cambridge: 2001); Vitkus, *Turning Turk*; Burton J., *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579–1624* (Newark: 2005); Dimmock M., *New Turkes, Dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: 2005); Birchwood M., *Staging Islam in England, Drama and Culture, 1640–1685* (Woodbridge: 2007) Degenhardt J.H. *Islamic Conversion and Christian Resistance on the Early Modern Stage* (Edinburgh: 2010); between Judaism and Christianity: Shapiro J., *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: 1996); Adelman J., *Blood Relations: Christian and Jew in The Merchant of Venice* (Chicago: 2008); Ephraim M., *Reading the Jewish Woman on the Elizabethan Stage* (Aldershot: 2008).

Early modern plays do not explicitly differentiate between interfaith and spiritual conversion. Both the exchange of denominations and the transcendental turn to God and the rejection of sin are simply referred to as 'conversion'. Indeed, I consider a play relevant when it explicitly uses the term 'conversion', its variant forms or synonyms, including apostasy, proselyte or to turn Turk, Jew, etcetera. Plays that specify the denominations involved I will regard as portraying or alluding to interfaith conversion; plays that mention conversion without explicitly referring to an exchange of confessions or religions, by contrast, I will categorize as spiritual, even though they are in most cases not entirely void of denominational clues. As a matter of fact, (early modern) spiritual conversion itself is a Christian concept, and conversions that are spiritual in the sense that they do not explicitly refer to a confession, can nevertheless often be convincingly construed in denominational terms. Converts asserting that their spiritual regeneration is solely the will and work of God, for instance, are more likely to have embraced a Protestant denomination than Catholicism. More profoundly, given that conversion is necessarily a personal experience, interfaith conversions are always modeled on the blueprint of spiritual conversion.

I have made an inventory of the way in which the terms conversion, converts and their related forms, including synonyms of religious conversion, such as apostasy, are used in plays that were performed in England between 1558–1642. Of around 100 plays, I selected 48 that refer to religious conversion in an unusual way, more than once or actually stage conversions. There is a telling difference between the portrayal of spiritual and interfaith conversion. The number of plays that stage the second kind or allude to the phenomenon is much larger than that of plays that present their audiences with spiritual conversion. Only the first four plays on this list actually stage spiritual conversions. This suggests an increasing concern with religion in its denominational form at the expense of spiritual faith. I will begin by demonstrating that from the early years of Elizabeth's reign, spiritual conversion as a major religious dramatic theme was ever more denominationalized, politicized and secularized, firstly by discussing three spiritual conversion plays, and secondly by looking at drama that only marginally features spiritual conversion, such as Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, and James Shirley's *The Witty Fair One*. As will become clear, spiritual conversion was gradually removed from main plots and used solely as a subplot device or referred to as a form of imagery. The argument of the next section, on interfaith conversion, is that

the theatrical depiction of this type of conversion reveals patterns of meaning that suggest an anxiety over a perceived lack of stability of denominational religion. In conversion tragedies, such as Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, virtually all conversions, including Christianizations, result in the death of the convert. Conversion comedies, such as Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and Philip Massinger's *The Renegado*, undermine Christianizations as cheerful triumphs of Christianity as well, but they also show the strict conditions under which conversions to Christianity can be portrayed as unambiguously positive events. As is shown in five comedies, this is only if the convert is a non-Christian woman whose Christianization coincides with her marriage to a Christian husband. A key to understanding the negative appreciation of interfaith conversion, I shall contend, is offered by Richard Zouch's comedy *The Sophister*, which portrays conversion as a character. Significantly, this play stages Conversion as interfaith conversion and as the vice of inconstancy. In addition, a number of plays connect interfaith conversion with commerce, suggesting that the way in which converts exchange one religion for another is not essentially different from the trading of commodities. I will argue, therefore, that early modern playwrights coupled conversion with symbols of irreversibility such as death and marriage, and created strict preconditions for a successful conversion because they intuited two disruptive aspects of the exchange of religion: its undermining effect on the virtue of constancy and on the intrinsic value of Christianity.

### *Spiritual Conversion*

Whether it occurs suddenly or involves a gradual process with ups and downs, spiritual conversion always implies a positive turn: a regeneration, rebirth or reformation. For centuries, this meaning of conversion dominated the dramatic plots of moral interludes, saint plays and biblical drama. Morality plays, which constitute a dramatic genre rooted in the thirteenth century, typically 'promote the path of righteousness and demonise the morally wrong paths a Christian might take in the familiar journey through life'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Coldewey J.C., "From Roman to Renaissance in Drama and Theatre", in Milling J. – Thomson P. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: 2004) 3–69, 54.

During the reign of Elizabeth, very few plays that centre around spiritual conversion were performed. Moreover, these works reveal an increasing interest in the denominational aspects of conversion. Three examples are Lewis Wager's *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* (c. 1550), and William Wager's *The Longer Thou Livest, the More Fool Thou Art* (c. 1559–1568), and *Enough Is as Good as a Feast* (c. 1571).<sup>6</sup> In the first play, this interest manifests itself in the Reformation agenda behind Marie's apparently spiritual regeneration and turn away from wickedness, and in a number of anti-Catholic gibes. *The Longer Thou Livest, the More Fool Thou Art* and *Enough Is as Good as a Feast* present spiritual conversion, or rather a series of failed attempts at it, to question the social and economic currents of the day.<sup>7</sup> As Ineke Murakami points out, in his seemingly 'orthodox' work, William Wager shows himself a 'shrewd' commentator, presenting 'his often inflammatory critique of the emerging capitalist state'.<sup>8</sup> A first clue to William's interest in a more secular interpretation of conversion can be found in the names of the virtues and vices. Where in Lewis Wager's morality they largely refer to theological concepts, in William Wager's plays many of them lack a clear religious meaning, such as Exercitation, Discipline, Temerity and Inconsideration. More strongly than *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*, the two moralities by William Wager mark the secularization of religious conversion in the theatre.

The denominational aspect of Lewis Wager's play is most apparent in its Calvinist treatment of Marie's conversion, which follows her 'perversion' by a number of Vices.<sup>9</sup> The conversion comprises different stages, each also personified by a Virtue. These Virtues, such as Repentance, Love and Iustification are presented in a way that confirm the teachings of Calvin as they can be found in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.<sup>10</sup> Marie's process of conversion commences when she encounters the character of The Lawe, who confronts her

<sup>6</sup> The dates mentioned are of first performance.

<sup>7</sup> William Wager, *The Longer Thou Livest* [1569] and *Enough Is as Good as a Feast* [1570], ed. R.M. Benbow (London: 1968). William was probably Lewis' son.

<sup>8</sup> Murakami I., "Wager's Drama of Conscience, Convention, and State Constitution", *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 47, 2 (2007) 305–329, 307, 320.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis Wager, *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene: A Morality Play Reprinted from the Original Edition of 1566*, ed. F.I. Carpenter (Chicago: 1904).

<sup>10</sup> For an overview of resemblances between passages of Wager's play and Calvin's *Institutes*, see White P., "Lewis Wager's *Life and Repentaunce of Mary Magdalene* and John Calvin", *Notes and Queries*, 28, 1 (1981) 508–512.

with the notion of original sin and the reprobation of all offenders against God's will. A little later Knowledge of Synne also appears to side with The Lawe. Although Marie realizes that she will be damned because of her profligacy, the effect of their words is bitter cynicism rather than a change of heart. The Lawe then explains to her that if she believes in the Messiah, her sins will be forgiven. Soon after this Christ appears to her in person and reiterates that there is still a path to salvation in the form of true repentance. In addition, Christ casts seven devils out of Marie. Certain of the saving power of God's grace, Marie prays for the consolidation of her still 'wauering and insufficient' faith. This is the moment the characters of Faith and Repentance make their appearance, clarifying that their virtues are 'ioyned continually'. Throughout these scenes the Vices interfere in the discussions and attempt to remove Marie from the sphere of influence of the Virtues, for instance by claiming that the term 'man' in Scripture only applies to men and not to women, but their efforts are eventually in vain. After Marie has expressed her regret over her past behaviour and has washed Christ's feet with her tears, Christ declares that Marie's faith 'hath saued [her]'. The play ends with declarations of faith by Marie, Iustification and Loue, the latter recapitulating the different stages of Marie's conversion.

The order in which the different Virtues appear strongly suggest a Reformed soteriology. To begin with, the play emphasizes God's vital role in the fulfillment of Old Testament law. As Christ explains,

blessed are they, as the Prophete doth say,  
Whose sinnes are forgiuen and couered by God's mercy;  
Not by the dedes of the lawe, as you thinke this day,  
But of God's good will, fauour and grace, freely. (ll. 1832–1834)

Also significant is that the characters of Faith and Repentance are presented to Marie by Christ *after* he has exorcised her and Marie has asserted her belief in the 'omnipotent' God, asking him for help. As Paul White reminds us,

faith and repentance, then, like the other spiritual benefits of regeneration, are not the causes, but rather the consequences of man's salvation. In accordance with Calvinist doctrine, they do not originate in man, but are bestowed on him by God.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> White, "Lewis Wager's Life" 512.



What is more, 'while others in the Reformed tradition assumed that man must repent of sin before faith is possible, Wager, like Calvin, consistently places faith before repentance in the process of conversion'.<sup>12</sup> Insisting on this strict sequence of spiritual virtues, Calvin underlined the more generally Protestant doctrine of man's complete dependence on God's grace for salvation. Marie explicitly confirms this notion when she says 'O Lorde, without thy grace I do here confesse / That I am able to do nothyng at all' and 'I am not able to doe sufficient penance, / Except thy grace, good Lord, do helpe me therto' (ll. 1379–1380, 1701–1702).

In discussing its transitory characteristics, scholars have shown how *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene* retains and reworks many features of the Saint play to convey a Protestant message. The play can also be seen, however, as an early manifestation of a transition from spiritually to denominationally oriented conversion drama. The play presents Marie's spiritual conversion with a denominational purpose: to incite its audience to renounce Catholicism and adopt the Reformed faith. Although Catholicism and Protestantism are not explicitly named, various clues indicate that Marie's rejection of sin and turn to God form a conversion from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism. For instance, the play opens on a 'parody of the Catholic service' with Infidelitie chanting Latin phrases that audiences would have recognized as allusions to the Catholic mass.<sup>13</sup> The vices are also presented as Catholic enemies in other ways, since they are on good terms with bishops and priests; these clergymen, moreover, are consistently bracketed together with 'pharisees' to make them appear even more disingenuous. Finally, and most importantly, Christ's evangelic message has strongly Calvinist overtones, while he himself is also portrayed as the bringer of Protestantism as the only true faith.

*The Longer Thou Livest, the More Fool Thou Art* presents the life story of the foolish Moros, who is a young boy at the beginning of the play, and, at the end, an imprudent old man who is eventually carried to the Devil. The middle part of the plot is devoted to the virtues' attempts at converting him, or, as they put it, 'alter[ing]' Moros' 'mind' and 'bring[ing] him to humanity' 'for the love that [they] owe to mankind, / And chiefly unto Christianity' (ll. 182–185), and to the

<sup>12</sup> White, "Lewis Wager's Life" 512.

<sup>13</sup> Carpenter in Wager, *Life and Repentaunce* 89 (note 2–4).

successes of the vices to keep him in a state of degeneracy. Rather than deploying them for a straightforward, moral warning against ignorance, the play uses these attempts of the virtues and manipulations of the vices to criticize a number of social evils. Although the play clearly condemns Moros' penchant for folly, such as playing card games and visiting prostitutes, as well as his incorrigibility, it also reproaches the virtues for failing to rectify Moros' behaviour. Ineke Murakami rightly points out that the remark of the Prologue that 'neither counsel, learning nor sapience / Can an evil nature to honest manners allure' does not so much indicate a 'passive reflection of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination' as the conviction that 'ethical training begins in the home, years before a child encounters the "good schoolmasters" who will guide him "to [his] own and other men's utility"' (ll. 36, 455).<sup>14</sup> Moros himself, on various occasions, boasts of the paltry upbringing he received from his parents.

Like *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*, *The Longer Thou Livest, the More Fool Thou Art* periodically lashes out at Catholicism. One of the virtues in the latter play even explicitly remarks that 'the pope and his adherents' advertise 'the greatest heresy that ever was', but more significant targets are precisely the consequences of the doctrines of English Protestantism (ll. 295–296). An example is, as Murakami notes, 'the *sola scriptura* literalism of contemporary Puritans' that the play merges with 'a bad, mercantile pragmatism'; the play exposes this evil by making Moros comically outwit the virtues through his insistence on the literal and therefore financial meaning of the term 'profit'.<sup>15</sup> Trading a book of 'goodly saints' for playcards to make quick money, Moros becomes a satire of the increasingly popular but unintended consequence of the strict Protestant doctrine that material wealth is a sign of divine election (ll. 761–775).<sup>16</sup>

Similar dramatic examples of 'what Max Weber will articulate centuries later as the difference between a Protestant work ethic and its unplanned effect: a secularized "spirit of capitalism"' can be found in William Wager's other spiritual conversion play, *Enough Is as Good as a Feast*, which virtually abandons anti-Catholic language altogether.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Murakami, "Wager's Drama" 309–310.

<sup>15</sup> Murakami, "Wager's Drama" 308–309.

<sup>16</sup> Murakami, "Wager's Drama" 309.

<sup>17</sup> Murakami, "Wager's Drama" 317.

Whereas Moros does not convert at all, Worldly Man, the main character in this play, does at least convert temporarily. The morality begins with this spiritual conversion. In a discussion with the two virtues Heavenly Man and Contentation, Worldly Man explains that he has an unstoppable desire for riches. This craving is prompted by the tragic fate of his father, who was beloved as a wealthy man but fell into disfavour when he lost his affluence. Although Worldly Man first contends that his wife and children would find 'small relief' at the hands of the two virtues when he dies, he is soon persuaded by the virtues to convert and give up his aspirations. Moments later, Worldly Man meets the vices whom he mistakes for their deceptive pseudonyms. The vice Inconsideration has adopted the name of Reason, Precipitation of Ready Wit, Temerity of Agility, and Ignorance of Devotion. Manipulated by the vices, Worldly Man swiftly wanders from the path of righteousness. He adopts Covetousness as his steward and exploits a Tenant, a Servant and a Hireling, callously rejecting their appeals for mercy. A Prophet eventually instigates Worldly Man's downfall and damnation by reminding him of the words of Scripture. Although Worldly Man recognizes the veracity of his words, he is not offered the chance to return. Tormented by God's Plague and unsuccessfully aided by a Physician who finally has to admit that 'God must needs strike', Worldly Man dies before he can complete his will and save his family financially. The play concludes with Satan carrying Worldly Man to his infernal destination.

While Worldly Man's temporary conversion and downfall are largely captured in spiritual religious terms, at stake are what the play presents as the abuses of the emerging Protestant middle-class. Thus, his initial conversion entails that he begins to live the proverb that is also the title of the play, 'enough is as good as a feast', and to desire to become like his heavenly counterpart. To illustrate this, Worldly Man is assisted by a virtue named Enough. 'I am content myself for to stay' Worldly Man notes, 'With Enough which bringeth me to quiet in body and mind' (ll. 662–663). Even the somewhat curious stage direction that Worldly Man must be dressed 'in a strange attire' when he first enters the stage after his conversion may be interpreted in the light of the secular aspect of his conversion. Rather than a religious person, Worldly Man has become a stranger to his former greedy self, as well as to the mercantile class, and might therefore be 'poorly arrayed', as is the costume direction for Enough who accompanies him. Worldly

Man's relapse into the sin of covetousness is caused by 'an error in judgment, as befits the newly sophisticated worldly-ascetic citizen'.<sup>18</sup> The precise moment of his fall is when Worldly Man is reminded of his father's fate by the vices who tell him that his father 'knew [them] both very well' and who make ample reference to Seneca, Solomon and Cicero in their attempt to convert him. Worldly Man judges their wisdom to be 'even as true as the Gospel' (ll. 821).<sup>19</sup> As Murakami observes, 'thus do even the seeming virtues of filial loyalty and classical knowledge pave the citizen's road to hell'.<sup>20</sup>

### *The Marginalization of Spiritual Conversion on the Stage*

Not all stage versions of spiritual conversion became increasingly politicized or secularized. In the course of the early decades of the seventeenth century, spiritual conversion was retained, but came to be relegated to subplots. This marginalization is illustrated in *As You Like It* (1603) and *The Queene of Arragon* (1640), where all conversions (in the former play), or some (in the latter play), take place offstage. Moreover, in many of the plays of this period, spiritual conversion is not even part of the action, but incorporated as a form of imagery. The theatrical use of or allusions to spiritual regeneration in this period must be seen as sudden eruptions of 'old-fashioned' mystical faith in a landscape dominated by denominational politics and interfaith conversions. Generally speaking, there are three thematic contexts in which these stagings of, or figurative references to spiritual conversions appear: worldliness (which is rejected for a life of devout spirituality), repentance and love.

At the end of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, the comic celebration of reconciliation and resolution is enhanced by the unexpected announcement that the usurping Duke Frederic, who had banished his younger brother from the court, has 'converted / Both from his enterprise and from the world'. He is said to have 'put on a religious life / And thrown into neglect the pompous court', having conversed with 'an old religious man' (5.4.155–157, 176–177). In William Habington's tragicomedy

<sup>18</sup> Murakami, "Wager's Drama" 316.

<sup>19</sup> Murakami, "Wager's Drama" 316–317.

<sup>20</sup> Murakami, "Wager's Drama" 317.

*The Queene of Arragon*, one of the characters of the court undergoes the same type of spiritual conversion as the Duke, 'vowing to / For-sake the flattered pompe and businesse of / The faithlesse world'.<sup>21</sup> After a brief reversion to old habits, he reconverts and works the true conversion of his friend, who 'vows' 'the remnant of [his] dayes' to 'Some undiscover'd Cave'.<sup>22</sup> This announcement sets an example for yet another convert: 'A strange conversion, / And 'twill behoove my fate to follow him'.<sup>23</sup> Unlike the plays by Lewis and William Wager, then, *As You Like It* and *The Queene of Arragon* do not deploy spiritual conversion to explain faith but present it as an unnamed and mysterious force that makes for unexpected plot twists.

In James Shirley's tragedy *The Traitor* (1631), conversion is synonymous with penitence. This work presents the tragic story of a family in Florence whose members are based on the historical De' Medici family, the main character Lorenzo having Lorenzino de' Medici as his historical counterpart.<sup>24</sup> In the play, the change of character of the Duke of Florence after a shocking confrontation is described as a 'conversion'. The lecherous Duke, in love with Amidea, the sister of the quick-tempered Sciarrha, has agreed with Sciarrha to meet Amidea in her apartment. Sciarrha's initial purpose, however, was to kill the Duke, but Amidea promises her brother that she will deal with the Duke in a way that will save his life. When the Duke attempts to rape Amidea, she draws a poniard, but instead of striking him, she wounds her own arm, warning him that she will kill herself. Telling the Duke that the bigger wound she intends to inflict upon herself will 'weep' for him, and, as she says, 'shall extol my death if it may teach / You to correct your blood', Amidea becomes a Christ-like figure, willing to sacrifice herself to redeem the sins of another person (3.3.101–103). The Duke immediately begins to repent: 'I am sorry, sorry from my soul' (3.3.109) and beg Amidea for mercy: 'Again I ask Forgiveness. / In thy innocence, I see / My own deformity' (3.3.119–121). Afterwards, various characters refer to this moment as the Duke's 'conversion'.

<sup>21</sup> William Habington, *The Queene of Arragon: A Tragi-comedie* (London: Tho. Cotes, 1640) sig. H2r. See for an extensive discussion of this play in relation to the political and theatrical context of its day Butler M., *Theatre and Crisis 1632–1642* (Cambridge: 1984) 62–76.

<sup>22</sup> Habington, *The Queene of Arragon* sig. I2v.

<sup>23</sup> Habington, *The Queene of Arragon* sig. I2v.

<sup>24</sup> James Shirley, *The Traitor* [1635], ed. Carter J.S. (London: 1965).

In addition to *The Traitor*, Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and James Shirley's *The Witty Fair One* (1628) show characters who repent and convert after an overwhelming confrontation with death. In Shakespeare's comedy, Oliver forswears the iniquity which manifested itself in denying his brother Orlando his patrimony. At the moment of his conversion, this wickedness is symbolized by a serpent and a lion preying on his sleeping body. When Orlando sees that his brother is in danger he fights the lion with his bare hands to save him. Impressed by the fact that Orlando did not take justified revenge on his brother, Oliver experiences a change of heart. Oliver's feelings of repentance remain unspoken. Instead, the play emphasizes the transformative nature of his conversion, which should be seen in the light of the metamorphic imagery and allusions that permeate the play.<sup>25</sup> Thus, when he is asked if he really is Orlando's malicious brother, he cryptically answers 'Twas I but 'tis not I'.

Shirley's comedy *The Witty Fair One*, too, plays with the division between a (former) bad and good self that conversion brings to the open. Again spiritual conversion features in a secondary plot, in this case that of Penelope and her beloved Fowler. Fowler is a young libertine and Penelope fully realizes that he will not remain loyal to her when they are married. She manages to 'convert' Fowler by means of a trick: assisted by her friends, she makes Fowler believe that he is dead. During a pretended funeral service, he hears Penelope speaking to his 'dead body'. She imagines what life would be like if he had not died but converted instead.<sup>26</sup> The trick comes to an end when Penelope no longer pretends Fowler is dead and tells him that he is only 'dead' to her if he does not profess his true love for her by reforming his life:

Y're dead to virtue, to all noble thoughts  
And till the proofe of your conuersion  
To piety winne my faith, you are to me  
Without all life [...].<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See for a discussion of conversion in relation to metamorphosis in this play, the introduction by A. Brissenden in William Shakespeare, *As You Like It* (Oxford: 2008) 1–86, 18–23.

<sup>26</sup> James Shirley, *The Wittie Faire One: A Comedie* (London: Bernard Alsop & Thomas Fawcet, 1633) sig. J3r.

<sup>27</sup> Shirley, *The Wittie Faire One* sig. J4r.

This then incites Fowler to 'convert' as well as propose to Penelope: 'reuiue me in my thoughts / And I will loue as thou hast taught me nobly / And like a husband'.<sup>28</sup>

Love is closely associated with conversion in many other spiritual conversion plays as well. When Portia, in *The Merchant of Venice* (c. 1597), has discovered that she has permission to marry her beloved Bassanio, she calls him her 'lord' and tells him that 'Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours / Is now converted' (3.2.165–167). In Thomas Heywood's comedy *The Fayre Mayde of the Exchange* (1601), a character who is madly in love is scorned by his brother and accused of worshipping a woman instead of God.

A man as free as aire, or the Sunnes raies,  
[...]  
To wrong the adoration of his Maker,  
By worshipping a wanton female skirt,  
And making Loue his Idoll: fie dotard, fie,  
I am ashamde of this apostacie<sup>29</sup>

In James Shirley's *The Constant Maid* (1640), the idea of religious love is invoked to illustrate secular love, 'conversion' meaning falling in love and 'apostatizing' leaving a lover. As the Gallant Playfair tells the young gentleman Hartwell: 'thou wot not be so much an Infidell / To think I meane thou shouldst forsake the wench'. Hartwell also notes that with regard to a certain woman, he only 'seemed a Proselyte In love', as he did not truly love her.

### *Interfaith Conversion*

While spiritual conversion was disappearing from the stage in the latter half of the sixteenth century, exchanges of religion became increasingly popular. The way in which these interfaith conversions are staged shows an unexpected paradox. It is not surprising that Christian characters who make the 'condemnable' decision of converting to Islam or embrace paganism seem to meet with divine punishment. An example

<sup>28</sup> Shirley, *The Wittie Faire One* sig. J5v.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Heywood, *The Fayre Mayde of the Exchange* (London: Valentine Simmes, 1607) sig. C3v.

is the renegade pirate Ward in Robert Daborne's *A Christian Turn'd Turk* (1612).<sup>30</sup> He commits suicide in a fit of desperate regret, and is then torn into pieces and thrown into the sea. Nabil Matar argues,

on stage, Islam had to be defeated, and those who converted to it had to be destroyed. Daborne knew that little could be realistically done about Ward or any other Englishmen who converted to Islam: what was possible was to inject fear about the consequences of apostasy. The English public would be made to see the divine retribution for rejecting Christianity.<sup>31</sup>

However, from this treatment of apostates from Christianity it would logically follow that heathen, Islamic and Jewish characters making the 'right' decision to embrace Christianity do not meet their death in an unpleasant way, but this is by no means the case. Indeed, when, in tragedies, characters adopt Christianity (and this happens much more often than figures defecting from it) the conversion is, as a rule, followed by the convert being murdered by a former coreligionist.

The character Corcut in Robert Greene's *Selimus, Emperor of the Turks* (1591) converts from Islam to Christianity, having 'conversed with Christians' and learned to 'save [his] soul', as he says himself.<sup>32</sup> However, he reveals his new religious identity to his evil brother who strangles him immediately after Corcut finishes his speech. In Thomas Kyd's *Solyman and Perseda* the caricatural braggart knight Basilisco is a Christian who turns Turk out of love for a woman.<sup>33</sup> When he learns that the object of his desire has married another man, however, he returns to Christianity, after which he is soon murdered by the emperor of the Turks. The principle does not only apply to Turks turning Christian. The tragedy *The Virgin Martyr* (1620), by Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger portrays the Roman pagan zealous persecutor of Christians Theophilus who, like the apostle Paul, repents and becomes a Christian himself.<sup>34</sup> This conversion however, is accompanied by his death through torture. Bitter fates also befall female converts to Christianity.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Daborne, *A Christian Turned Turk* [1612], in Vitkus D. (ed.), *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England* (New York: 2000).

<sup>31</sup> Matar, *Islam in Britain* 58.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Greene, *Selimus, Emperor of the Turks* [1594], in Vitkus D. (ed.), *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England* (New York: 2000).

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Kyd, *The Tragedy of Soliman and Perseda* [1592], in Boas F.S. (ed.), *The Works of Thomas Kyd* (Oxford: 1901) 161–229.

<sup>34</sup> Philip Massinger – Thomas Dekker, *The Virgin Martyr* in Bowers F. (ed.), *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: 1958).



In *The Virgin Martyr*, the two pagan daughters of the persecutor of Christians Theophilus are killed by their enraged father after their conversion to Christianity. In Henry Shirley's *The Martyr'd Soldier* (1627), a character named Bellizarius converts to Christianity and so does his wife Victoria, but both are tortured to death.<sup>35</sup> The Jewess Abigail, Barabas' daughter in Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (1592) is also baptised.<sup>36</sup> This happens after she has pretended to be a Christian nun in order to help her father regain his confiscated possessions. When she learns that her father is responsible for the death of her lover and a friend, she forswears what she calls 'follies of the world' and enters the monastery in all sincerity. Barabas becomes infuriated and secretly poisons her.

*Selimus, Emperor of the Turks; Solyman and Perseda; The Virgin Martyr; The Martyrd Soldier* and *The Jew of Malta* are tragedies and it could be argued that the killings of the converts to Christianity are in line with the genre, where bad fortune beats justice in terms of denouement.<sup>37</sup> The killings of the new Christians unarguably underscore the savagery of the non-Christian characters. It is also likely that audiences considered the new Christians as martyrs of the faith, who awaited their reward in heaven. This is explicitly suggested in the play that is very much concerned with martyrdom, *The Virgin Martyr*, where Theophilus is visited by angels carrying a 'Crowne for him', after his agonizing death. Yet it would be too simple to look no further than these explanations, if only because in comedies, too, conversions to Christianity are accompanied by adversity or problematized, though much more subtly.

Two illustrative comedies are Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* (1624) and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. In *The Renegado* we meet the Italian renegade and debauched pirate Antonio Grimaldi who repents his turn to Islam.<sup>38</sup> Having endured great agony over his

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<sup>35</sup> Henry Shirley, *The Martyr'd Soldier* [1638], in Bullen A.H. (ed.), *Old English Plays: New Series*, vol. 1 (New York: 1964).

<sup>36</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta* [1633], in Bevington D. – Rasmussen E. (eds.), *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays* (Oxford: 1995) 247–322.

<sup>37</sup> An exception is James Shirley's *St. Patrick for Ireland*, discussed in detail by Alison Searle elsewhere in this volume. This tragedy does not relate its conversions to death, yet it is not unthinkable that James Shirley did have a fatal end in mind for his converting characters, as he wrote it with the intention to produce a sequel but appears to have never done so.

<sup>38</sup> Philip Massinger, *The Renegado*, in Vitkus, ed., *Three Turk Plays*.

desperate situation, certain that he will be damned, he meets a Franciscan friar who informs him that he can redeem his soul by performing a good deed. Despite the fact that Grimaldi manages to save himself, his reintegration as a Christian is not as smooth and joyful as is often argued. I cannot agree with Nabil Matar who claims that ‘Massinger presented a Happy ending for this renegade’ or with Daniel Vitkus’ interpretation of Grimaldi as a ‘successful, surviving hero’.<sup>39</sup> Of course, compared to the fate of Daborne’s Ward, Grimaldi’s fortune is much brighter, if only because he does not die and seizes the chance to reform. Yet within the context of *The Renegado*, the repentant sinner is figuratively destroyed through the stark contrast between him and a true Christian hero who does manage to remain constant in his faith under violent pressure. That is, this Christian, the Venetian Gentleman Vitelli, both defies a forced conversion to Islam on pain of death and resists the temptations of the attractive Muslim woman Donusa. What is more, Vitelli even manages to convert Donusa to Christianity. Though both Grimaldi and Vitelli manage to escape the Turks and return to Christian territory, Vitelli is rewarded with the doubly perfect woman Donusa. That is, the play invites us to consider her as not only exotic and sexually attractive, but now also a virtuous Christian. Equally important is the contrast between Grimaldi’s formerly sinful self – but very ‘masculine’ in his intrepidity – and the new Grimaldi after his atonement. The former pirate is reduced to a sorry figure or nobody, which is most clearly demonstrated in his very last words on the stage in which Grimaldi portrays himself as the malleable servant of his confessor Francisco, bereft of any sense of identity. As he tells him, ‘I am nothing / But what you please to have me be’ (5.2.37–38). Vitkus writes that ‘Grimaldi’s unruly masculinity is recuperated for the service of Christendom’. Bindu Malieckal even claims that Grimaldi in reconverting ‘regains his “manhood”’, having earlier undergone a ‘spiritual emasculation’ by embracing Islam.<sup>40</sup> Yet I would argue that Grimaldi as a Christian turned Turk, and, as such, the personification of ‘unruly masculinity’, is precisely emasculated with his return to Christianity, which marks the erasure of his very identity. It is worth noting in this respect that the term ‘nothing’, that

<sup>39</sup> Matar, *Islam in Britain* 59; Vitkus, *Turning Turk* 161.

<sup>40</sup> Vitkus, *Three Turk Plays* 43; Malieckal B., “‘Wanton Irreligious Madness’: Conversion and Castration in Massinger’s *The Renegado*”, *Essays in Arts and Sciences*, 31 (2002) 25–43, 26.

Grimaldi uses to describe himself after his reconversion to Christianity, was also an Elizabethan slang term for the female genitalia.

The problematic nature of Shylock's conversion in *The Merchant of Venice* is located first and foremost in the fact that it is coerced.<sup>41</sup> A detailed discussion of the extensive and ongoing debate about Shylock's conversion is beyond the scope of this article, yet I can say that recent approaches tend to argue that even for Shakespeare's audiences this conversion is by no means an unequivocal triumph of Christian truth and mercy. Marianne Novy writes that 'the experience of pressured conversion in his society made it likely that he [Shakespeare] and some audience members in his own time felt that Shylock's forced conversion went too far'.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Antonio's demand for baptism is hardly a well-founded Christian desire for a change of heart but rather a wish that Shylock instantly transforms himself into a Christian. For the favour of confiscating only half of Shylock's goods, Antonio desires that 'He presently become a Christian' (4.1.383). What also frustrates an uncomplicated reading of this particular conversion is the fact that we do not see Shylock as a convert. We only know that he is 'not well' when he leaves the stage.

There is one category of conversions to Christianity that remains unproblematic: the conversion of a non-Christian woman to the faith of her Christian husband whom she marries at the same time. We find these conversion-cum-marriages only in the following comedies: *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Renegado*, John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's *The Knight of Malta* (1616–1619), John Fletcher's *The Island Princess* (1619) and Philip Massinger's *The Emperor of the East* (1631). These plays emphasize that the marriage and the conversion are truly interlocked by making them interchangeable. For example, in *The Merchant of Venice*, Jessica, having decided that she wants to escape her father's unpleasant household, exclaims 'O Lorenzo / If thou keep promise, I shall end this strife, / Become a Christian and thy loving wife' (2.3.19–21). Here, marriage and conversion coincide. A similar formulation can be found in *The Renegado*. The Christian

<sup>41</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* [1600], ed. Halio J.L. (Oxford: 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Novy M., "The Merchant of Venice and Pressured Conversions in Shakespeare's World" in Fotheringham R. – Jansohn C. – White R.S. (eds.), *Shakespeare's World / World Shakespeares: The Selected Proceedings of the International Shakespeare Association World Congress Brisbane 2006* (Newark: 2008) 108–118, 110.

Vitelli manages to convince the Islamic Donusa of the Christian truth, at which moment he says: 'O Donusa / Die in my faith, like me; and 'tis a marriage / At which celestial angels shall be waiters, / And such as have been sainted welcome us' (4.3.150–153). In *The Knight of Malta*, the Christian character Angelo relates how, having been taken captive by the Turks, he became engaged to a beautiful Turkish woman whom he converted at the same time:

I laboured her conversion with my love,  
And doubly won her; to fair faith her soule  
She first betroth'd, and then her faith to me (5.2.167–174)<sup>43</sup>

*The Island Princess* is set on one of the islands of the Moluccas.<sup>44</sup> Here, the princess Quisara falls in love with the noble Portuguese Armusia and asks him to convert to her unidentified faith. He refuses, is tortured for this, but, astonished by his constancy, the princess decides to turn Christian and die with him. This effectively paves the way for their marriage. Though the princess does not yet know that she and her future husband will be spared, the way in which she describes her desire to convert also prefigures their marriage:

A virgin won by your fair constancy,  
And glorying that she is won so, will dye by ye.  
[...]  
Your faith, and your religion must be like ye  
[...]  
I do embrace your faith sir, and your fortune (5.2.109–121)

Finally, the tragicomedy *The Emperor of the East* relates the story of the jealous Christian and Byzantine emperor Theodosius who marries the pagan and 'strange virgin' Athenais.<sup>45</sup> The conversion will take place concurrently, as Theodosius announces: 'In the same houre / In which she is confirmed in our faith, / We mutually will give away each other, / And both be gainers' (2.1.396–399).

From this brief survey, it seems that early modern theatrical representations of interfaith conversion are determined by theatrical genre

<sup>43</sup> John Fletcher, *The Knight of Malta* [1647], ed. Williams G.W. in Bowers F. (ed.), *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, vol. 8 (Cambridge: 1992).

<sup>44</sup> John Fletcher, *The Island Princess* [1647], ed. Williams G.W. in Bowers F. (ed.), *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, vol. 5 (Cambridge: 1982).

<sup>45</sup> Philip Massinger, *The Emperor of the East* [1632] in Edward Ph. – Gibson C. (eds.), *The Plays and Poems of Philip Massinger* (Oxford: 1976).

and, to a lesser extent, gender, instead of religion. There is no fundamental difference between Christianizations of Jews, Muslims or adherers of any other non-Christian persuasion. Yet, whereas tragedies depict a world in which conversion necessarily leads to death, comedies show the conditions under which a conversion is acceptable and, as such, can even function as an ending in which social order is festively restored. In so doing, comedies involving conversion tend to rely on marriage as the traditional form of comedic closure and merge it with the Christianization of a woman. It is likely that playwrights were only interested in female converts in depictions of these weddings because women were considered to be of a more changeable nature<sup>46</sup> and therefore more prone to Christianization. Equally important is the fact that these theatrical marriage-cum-Christianizations stressed the analogy between a woman's submission to her husband and his God.

There is, however, a more fundamental reason why playwrights tended to either combine conversion with death or conflate it with marriage. An essential part of the answer can be found in the only early modern play, to my knowledge, that features conversion as a character. This is the obscure comedy and university play *The Sophister* (c. 1614–1620), attributed to the civil lawyer Richard Zouch.<sup>47</sup> In this play, conversion is only a minor character that appears onstage only briefly and has just a few lines. From his assertion that he 'will to Flushing, Middleborough, Amsterdam, peradventure thence to Antwerp, and so to see Rheams and Roome', we can conclude that Conversion represents interfaith conversion. These places, many of them commercial centres, were either strongly associated with a particular denominational identity or known for their rich variety of denominations; the cities could nourish Conversion's desire to exchange one newly adopted

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<sup>46</sup> In the *Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene*, for instance, Marie's female sex is consistently coupled with changeability. According to Infidelity, 'the promise of maidens' are 'as stable as a weake leafe in the wynde; / Like as a small blast bloweth a feather away, / So a faire word truele chaungeth a maiden's mynd' (ll. 122–125) while elsewhere Malicious Iudgement asserts that 'Women's heartes turne oft as doth the wynde' (1529). Although Marie's turn to God also implies (yet) another change of character, Wager counters the suggestion that she might relapse into impiety by presenting her conversion as a consolidation of faith. Thus, Repentance declares that 'true repentance neuer turneth backe again' (l. 1375) and Marie's treatment of Christ's body is presented as proof of her sincerity. Moreover, the very Protestant suggestion that Marie's conversion is the work of God rather than herself adds to the idea that her change of heart is not the symptom of an inconstant character.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Zouch, *The Sophister, A Comedy* (London: John Okes, 1639).

confession for another over and over again as if they were commodities. Crucially, *The Sophister* thus portrays Conversion as an essentially changeable, elusive and opportunistic character, regardless of the fact that a conversion could imply and often did entail an embrace of the 'right' faith. In other words, conversion is here presented as intrinsically problematic. The character Aequipolency says to him: 'thou art rather a Pythagorian Peripatetick, thy very essence is mutability. Thy soul could walk through more Sects then some honest bodies have chang'd suits: methinks thou mightst do well at home by temporizing' (3.4). He also advises Conversion to read Lipsius' *On Constancy*,<sup>48</sup> and to take an Aurum potable (drinkable gold) containing 'some two leavs of reasons, and ten of authority', suggesting that Conversion needs to be cured of irrationality and feebleness. Conversion himself does little to contradict the accusations. Moreover, he shows himself to be a highly opportunistic character when he responds to a remark by Aequipolency: 'Well, except the morrow Sunne display more comfort, I am gone beleeve it'.

*The Sophister* reduces interfaith conversion to changeability – 'thy very essence is mutability' which goes hand in hand with irrationality and opportunism. In so doing, the play points to an early modern anxiety over the exchange of religions that had begun to dominate the way in which interfaith conversions were perceived. As many of Shirley and his colleagues' contemporaries perceived it, the essence of conversion was not so much the affirmation of newly found religious assurance as a form of fickleness. This idea was, among other things, fostered by the fact that many converts had difficulty maintaining their newly acquired conviction. One of these was the priest Anthony Tyrrell who changed no less than six times between Catholicism and Protestantism between 1586 and 1605. '[E]ach occasion of change was accompanied by perfectly plausible theological explanations of why he was still moving between particular expressions of the true Church and how he perceived himself on each occasion to be subject to the operations of grace'.<sup>49</sup> It was precisely their unsteadiness in faith that

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<sup>48</sup> Conversion's response to this suggestion is that he can make use of Lipsius, as he will lead 'the way from Leyden to Doway'. In actual fact, Lipsius went from Leiden to Leuven and not to the Catholic stronghold of Douai where English priests were trained.

<sup>49</sup> Questier, *Conversion* 56.

converts were accused of.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, the virtue of constancy is widely propagated in dramatic texts. As we have seen, Christians are tortured by non-Christians into renouncing their faith, in *The Renegado*, and in various other (conversion) plays, such as John Day, William Rowley and George Wilkins' *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* (1607) and *The Island Princess*, but they successfully and heroically resist. In doing so, these characters stress the importance of remaining steadfast in belief, and underscore the supremacy of constancy over conversion.

There is a fundamental difference between spiritual conversion and interfaith conversion in this respect, which manifests itself in the fact that spiritual conversion on the stage mostly remains unproblematised. Whereas the change in a spiritual conversion is necessarily an improvement, an enhancement of character, a change for the better, the change of an interfaith conversion is first and foremost an *exchange* of denominations. Even if converts embrace 'the right' faith, there is no guarantee that they will not subsequently exchange it for their previous or a wholly other confession. In other words, when 'conversion' began to signify primarily an exchange of religions, the term took a negative turn. If the convert's change raised anxiety about his trustworthiness, the exchange of denominations also indicated a problem with the religions involved. Interfaith conversions increasingly came to signify the exchangeability of faith and the corrosion of the intrinsic value of religious doctrines and practices. It is no coincidence that a number of plays, like *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Renegado*, are set in a commercial context, and explicitly link conversion to concepts of trade. Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice*, for instance, literally gilds herself with money when she flees her parental home to convert and marry. In *The Renegado*, Vitelli's servant, when asked about his religion claims that:

I would not be confined  
In my belief: when all your sects and sectaries  
Are grown of one opinion, if I like it  
I will profess myself – in the mean time,  
Live in England, Spain, France, Rome, Geneva:  
I'm of that country's faith. (1.1.32–37)

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<sup>50</sup> Questier, *Conversion* 56.

Significantly, not only is Gazet, at this moment, disguised as a merchant, his name is also a variant of 'the word for a Venetian coin of small value that circulated throughout the Levant'.<sup>51</sup> The passage even suggests the close connection between nationality and faith, indicating that a stable sense of national identity was jeopardized by interfaith conversion.

Plays featuring interfaith conversion make an intuitive attempt to rescue Christian identity from the destabilizing effects of exchange, or conversion, by investing them with forms of absoluteness, emblems of irreversibility. Death is, of course, an obvious example. So was marriage in the early modern period, divorce being virtually exclusively reserved for the occasional king. In the world of the early modern English theatre, a Christianization was either justified and reassuringly consolidated by death or by a marriage which prevented the woman convert from tergiversating.

In a few cases conversion by a man to Christianity is not directly connected to a form of irreversibility. An example is Shylock's baptism. I agree with Janet Adelman when she says that 'the play never encourages the audience to take the possibility of Shylock's conversion seriously'.<sup>52</sup> Refusing to show Shylock as a convert, *The Merchant of Venice* leaves this new identity to the imagination and it is almost impossible to think of him as a Christian. In Thomas Heywood's second part of *The Fair Maid of the West* (1631), there is an unproblematic conversion of the Islamic pasha Joffer to Christianity.<sup>53</sup> However, the announcement of this conversion marks the very ending of the play, so we do not see him as a convert either. What is more, it is really a conversion without a change. Throughout the play, Joffer has shown himself to be a true Christian rescuing the Christian characters from the jaws of the Muslims. Joffer does not change, he only acquires a more fitting name for his identity.

### Conclusion

Scholars of conversion, particularly historians and theologians, have traditionally focussed on autobiographical or biographical texts, but

<sup>51</sup> Vitkus, *Three Turk Plays* 247.

<sup>52</sup> Adelman, *Blood Relations* 78.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Heywood, *The Fair Maid of the West, Part II*, ed. Turner, R.K. (London: 1968).



these comprise only a part of the picture and are often not sensitive to the emotions converts raised with other people and their communities. Theatrical representations of converts and conversion open up new dimensions to the early modern experience of faith and allow us to better grasp its complexity. In addition, it is worth looking further than a single denomination when exploring conversion on the early modern stage. There are cross-religious patterns that point to the profound issues of constancy and change in the experience of conversion and religious identity, issues that became more urgent than ever due to the religious upheavals that marked late sixteenth and seventeenth century England. Spiritual conversion fades to the background in two distinct ways. On the one hand, religious regeneration is more and more infused with politico-denominational or secular significance; on the other, it is marginalized and deployed as a plot device or a form of imagery. At the same time, interfaith conversion dramatically increases in popularity. The manner in which it is staged not only points to anxieties about converts' reliability and the undermining of the intrinsic value of Christian identity, but by associating exchanges of denominations with symbols of irrevocability, playwrights also employ a strategy to take away these fears.

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TURNING PERSIA:  
THE PROSPECT OF CONVERSION IN SAFAVID IRAN

Chloë Houston

In the past decade, studies of the relationship between Christianity and Islam in the early modern period have developed a picture of a series of complex interactions, taking place in a wide variety of circumstances and over a broad geographical range. Studies of Muslim-Christian relations and encounters, and of their depiction in European literature, theatre and art, have demonstrated that Christian representations of Muslim peoples and identities were equally complex and diverse.<sup>1</sup> The expansion of the Ottoman empire during this period caused some European commentators to perceive that Islam represented ‘the greatest terror of the world’, a fear which was compounded by the perception that large numbers of Christians were ‘turning Turk’.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the multiplicity of Christian perceptions of Muslims and vice versa being established by recent research suggests that early modern conceptions of religious otherness were open to a range of perspectives. Nabil Matar’s influential 1998 study of Islam in early modern Britain demonstrated that the variety of European religious and cultural encounters with Muslim peoples resulted in multiple fabrications of images of Muslims in sermons, drama, eschatology, and so on, whilst his recent book on Muslim perceptions of the European world,

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example: Matar N., *Islam in Britain, 1558–1685* (Cambridge: 1998); Id., *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: 1999); Jardine L. – Brotton J., *Global Interests: Renaissance Art Between East and West* (London: 2000); Vitkus D., *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570–1630* (New York: 2003); Burton J., *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579–1624* (Newark: 2005); Dimmock M., *New Turkes: Dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: 2005); MacLean G. (ed.), *Re-Orienting the Renaissance: Cultural Exchanges with the East* (London: 2005); Birchwood M., *Staging Islam in England: Drama and Culture, 1640–1685* (Cambridge: 2007); MacLean G., *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire Before 1800* (Basingstoke: 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Richard Knolles, *The Generall Historie of the Turkes, from the first beginning of that Nation to the Rising of the Othoman Familie* (London, Adam Islip: 1603) “To The Reader”.

has argued that in the Arab-Islamic West at least there was a wide range of perspectives, rather than a 'monolithic construction of otherness'.<sup>3</sup> There would appear to be a consensus, as Matthew Dimmock has argued in a recent essay on early Christian conceptions of Muhammad and Islam, that a single coherent narrative of religious encounter in this period is not possible, given the different environments in which such encounters took place, and the variety of means in which they were represented, in ways often far removed from the initial point of contact.<sup>4</sup> The subject of conversion between Christianity and Islam was, correspondingly, treated differently according to the context in which it was encountered. The idea of conversion could operate as a negative threat, as suggested by the fear of Christians 'turning Turk', but also as a means of exploring a complex range of issues surrounding religious and national difference.

Whilst some studies of Muslim-Christian relations have highlighted the aggression and enmity between the two faiths, creating an image of what William Dalrymple has called 'two hostile blocs clashing incessantly for 1,500 years', the notion that such relations were primarily or exclusively antagonistic has been revised.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, current scholarship is demonstrating that, despite the hostilities that might exist between them, Christians saw the potential for common ground between each of the 'religions of the book': Christianity, Islam and Judaism.<sup>6</sup> It is thus becoming increasingly difficult to maintain that there existed a clear and concrete division between 'East' and 'West', or between different 'worlds' of Muslims and Christians in the early modern era.<sup>7</sup> Christian and Islamic spheres overlapped, coincided, and were delineated by changing and permeable boundaries, so that the notion of separate 'worlds' is inaccurate and potentially misleading. Instead,

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<sup>3</sup> Matar N., *Islam in Britain 20 and passim*; Matar N., *Europe Through Arab Eyes, 1578–1727* (New York: 2009) 5.

<sup>4</sup> Dimmock M., "A Human Head to the Neck of a Horse": Hybridity, Monstrosity and Early Christian Conceptions of Muhammad and Islam", in Dimmock M. – Hadfield A. (eds.), *The Religions of the Book: Christian Perceptions, 1400–1660* (Basingstoke: 2008) 66.

<sup>5</sup> Dalrymple W., "Foreword: The Porous Frontiers of Islam and Christendom: A Clash or Fusion of Civilisations?", in MacLean G. (ed.), *Re-Orienting the Renaissance* xv. For hostility between Muslims and Christians, see Lewis B., *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (London: 1982; repr. 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Dimmock – Hadfield, *The Religions of the Book* 1.

<sup>7</sup> See Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*; MacLean G., *The Rise of Oriental Travel: English Visitors to the Ottoman Empire, 1580–1720* (Basingstoke: 2004); Birchwood M. – Dimmock M. (eds.), *Cultural Encounters Between East and West, 1453–1699* (Newcastle: 2005) 1.

useful recent work has shown the variety of means by which Europeans accessed the information that moulded their perceptions of and attitudes towards Muslim countries and Islam.<sup>8</sup> One of the most obvious and most important ways in which people of different faiths and nations learned about each other was by direct encounter; thus, for Europeans, a major source of information about Muslims and Muslim countries came from the travel writings of those who had visited such places. Printed accounts of travels abroad, which were produced in increasing numbers from the later sixteenth century, were 'perhaps the most influential means of "mapping" the different territories of the East for European consumers'.<sup>9</sup> Such reports record the variety of encounters involving European merchants, diplomats, independent travellers and missionaries in Muslim countries, and demonstrate the interest they showed in the differences between Muslim peoples and nations, as well as the similarities.

The question of religious conversion is particularly interesting when considered within the context of the presence of multiple Islamic identities in the early modern European imagination and the various ways in which Christians and Muslims encountered and represented one another. The idea of conversion is itself a complicated topic, particularly in times of religious discord and change. As Michael C. Questier noted in his study of conversion in England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the subject of conversion is 'drawn out of a matrix of political and religious factors'; discussions of religious conversion are not limited to the subject of religion alone, but can be involved with national, political and social identities.<sup>10</sup> As the essays in this volume demonstrate, the idea and practice of conversion took on a particular set of meanings in the early modern period, and the religious discord and debate of the period gave the notion of conversion a particular importance. With reference to early modern exchanges between Christianity and Islam, the idea of 'turning Turk' has become a focal point for scholars interested in Christian-Muslim relationships. Nabil Matar, for example, records that thousands of Christians

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example: Bisaha N., *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (Philadelphia: 2004); Dimmock – Hadfield (eds.), *The Religions of the Book*; and the essays in Blanks D.R. – Frassetto M. (eds.), *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other* (Basingstoke: 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Ballaster R., *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England, 1662–1785* (Oxford: 2005) 36.

<sup>10</sup> Questier M.C., *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580–1625* (Cambridge: 1996) 2.

converted to Islam in the Renaissance, and argues that the Ottoman Empire offered opportunities and attractions to Christians who sought employment or advancement.<sup>11</sup> The notion of ‘turning’ from one faith to another raises some interesting questions about religious and other identities.<sup>12</sup> What did it mean to convert from one faith to another during this period? How do accounts of conversion reflect on the relationships between different faiths? And what can early modern ideas about conversion tell us about the ways in which the early modern world thought about faith and religion more generally? Whilst Christian to Muslim conversion was more common in this period, and has in consequence been more widely studied in modern scholarship, Muslim to Christian conversion was by no means a rare phenomenon, and merits further study.<sup>13</sup> This essay will look in detail at the prospect of one instance of Muslim to Christian conversion, the rumoured conversion of the Safavid Shah ‘Abbās I (r. 1587–1629 CE); in doing so, it will demonstrate that representations of Islamic to Christian conversion reflected European attitudes to Islam, but were also bound up with contemporary divisions within the Christian church. Close consideration of actual or rumoured religious conversions in the early modern era may contribute to the scholarly efforts to focus on specific historical moments in the relations between Muslims and Christians that Nabil Matar has identified as important for the study of this period.<sup>14</sup> In the case considered here, actual conversion never took place; ‘Abbās remained a Muslim, and his change of religion was nothing more than conjecture. This essay will begin by considering the contexts for these rumours, and firstly the place of Christianity in contemporary Iran.

### *Christianity in Safavid Iran*

The Safavid dynasty dates from 1501 and the reign of Ismā‘īl I, the shah who ruled until 1524 and was the great-grandfather of ‘Abbās I.

<sup>11</sup> Matar, *Islam in Britain* 15–16.

<sup>12</sup> For the concept of ‘turning Turk’ and its use in English drama of the period, see, for example, Vitkus D., *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570–1630* and Burton J., *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579–1624*.

<sup>13</sup> On Muslim to Christian conversion, see, for example, Dimmock, *New Turkes* 104–106, and Matar, *Europe Through Arab Eyes* 44, 192–193.

<sup>14</sup> Matar, *Europe Through Arab Eyes* 5.



The Safavid years constituted a period of political stability for Persia, during which relations with Europe became closer and trade increased. It was Ismā'īl who had introduced Ithnā'ashari or 'Twelver' Shi'ism to Iran, so that Iran became principally a Shi'ite state, in contrast to the neighbouring Ottoman empire which was chiefly Sunni.<sup>15</sup> The difference of faith between Shi'ite and Sunni had played a significant role in the aggression between the Safavids and the Ottomans during this period, and this sectarian division was also noted by European travellers to the region.<sup>16</sup> Often benefitting in the eyes of European travellers from comparison to the Ottoman empire, Iran had, by the end of the fifteenth century, come to be seen 'as one of many ancient civilizations from whom Christian Europe might hope to learn, a fount of "alien wisdom" on a par with ancient Egypt'.<sup>17</sup> 'Abbās I, who ruled from 1587 to 1629, is often considered as having presided over a cultural and military highpoint of the Safavid era and, thanks to the development of trade and diplomatic links between Iran and Europe, became a relatively well known figure in Europe.

Early modern Iran had a complex religious history, and a variety of non-Muslim communities lived alongside the Shi'ite Muslim majority. Christian groups living in Iran during the reign of Shah 'Abbās can be divided into three main groups: indigenous Christians, or those who moved to Iran from neighbouring areas; those involved with missionary activity; and European travellers and merchants. The first group included indigenous Armenians as well as Circassians, Georgians, and

<sup>15</sup> On Persia under the Safavid dynasty, see Savory R., *Iran Under the Safavids* (Cambridge: 1980); Jackson P. – Lockhart L. (eds.), *The Cambridge History Of Iran: Volume 6: The Timurid and Safavid Periods* (Cambridge: 1986), especially Chapter 7; Garthwaite G.R., *The Persians*, (Oxford: 2005) Chapter 6. For the origins of Shi'ism, its emergence as state religion under the Safavids, and its significance in Persia/Iran, see Arjomand S.A., *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890*, (Chicago: 1984) Part 2, and Petrushevsky I.P., *Islam in Iran*, trans. by H. Evans (London: 1985) 30–3. For Shi'i Islam in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Momen M., *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (Oxford: 1985) 105–14. On the Ottoman-Safavid conflict and its sources, see Allouche A., *The Origins and Development of the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict (906–962/1500–1555)* (Berlin: 1983).

<sup>16</sup> On the role played by religious enmity in Iran's wars with Sunni states, see Petrushevsky I.P., *Islam in Iran* 326. On the presentation of Safavid Iran and the divisions between Sunni and Shi'a in European travel writing see Houston C., "Thou Glorious Kingdome, Thou Chiefe of Empires': Persia in Early Seventeenth-Century Travel Literature", *Studies in Travel Writing* 13, 2 (2009) 141–152.

<sup>17</sup> Meserve M., *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought* (Cambridge, MA: 2008) 218.

Nestorians. Since their settlement of Hormuz in 1508, the Portuguese had claimed authority of such Christians in the surrounding area, of whom the majority were Armenians, mostly belonging to the Apostolic Church.<sup>18</sup> Shah 'Abbās is thought to have promoted the role of the indigenous Armenian community of Iran as go-betweens with European merchants seeking to do business in his country.<sup>19</sup> The second group was comprised of European Catholic missionaries, and particularly Carmelites and Augustinians, who founded mission houses throughout the Middle East and India. By the time the Venetian noble Ambrosio Bembo travelled through Persia in the 1670s, these mission houses formed a network which supplied accommodation, information, banking and postal services to European travellers in the region.<sup>20</sup> Bembo's visit included a period in Isfahan, the city which 'Abbās had made his capital, which was home to a Carmelite mission house that included by then a lower cloister, a sizeable dormitory and even its own printing press.<sup>21</sup> In 'Abbās's own time, Carmelite, Augustine and Capuchin missionaries were present in Isfahan.<sup>22</sup> The third group, who were travellers from Europe to Iran and the court of Shah 'Abbās, were mostly engaged with trade or diplomatic missions from England, Spain, the Netherlands and, later, France.

These travellers included the Sherley brothers, who arrived at Qazvin in 1598 and later returned separately to Europe to represent the shah's interests. The Sherley brothers' mission gave rise to a variety of writings, including travel accounts by Anthony Sherley himself and by men who travelled with him or Robert, such as the Englishmen William Parry and George Manwaring, and his French steward Abel Pinçon.<sup>23</sup> These and other contemporary travel writers often record

<sup>18</sup> Khanbaghi A., *The Fire, the Star and the Cross: Minority Religions in Medieval and Early Modern Iran* (London: 2006) 124.

<sup>19</sup> Welch A., "Safavi Iran Seen Through Christian Eyes", in Newman A.J. (ed.), *Society and Culture in the Early Modern Middle East: Studies on Iran in the Safavid Period* (Leiden: 2003) 113.

<sup>20</sup> Welch A., "Safavi Iran Seen Through Christian Eyes" 100.

<sup>21</sup> Welch A., "Safavi Iran Seen Through Christian Eyes" 104.

<sup>22</sup> Blow D. (ed.), *Persia: Through Writers' Eyes* (London: 2007) 87.

<sup>23</sup> For the Sherley brothers' travels in Persia, see: Babinger F., *Sherleiana* (Berlin: 1932); Denison Ross E. (ed.), *Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure* (London: 1933; repr. 2005); Penrose B., *The Sherleian Odyssey* (Taunton: 1938); Davies D.W., *Elizabethans Errant: The Strange Fortunes of Sir Thomas Sherley and His Three Sons* (Ithaca, NY: 1967) Chapters 5, 6 and 9; Parr A., "Introduction", in Parr A. (ed.), *Three Renaissance Travel Plays: The Travels of the Three English Brothers, The Sea Voyage, The Antipodes* (Manchester: 1995; repr. 1999); Parr A., "Foreign Relations

a perception that their Persian hosts were more welcoming towards European travellers and more tolerant of Christianity than the neighbouring Ottomans (or 'Turks'). In his report of Anthony Sherley's travels, for example, printed in 1601, Parry notes that the Persians' manner is 'kinde and curteous (farre differing from the Turkes)', and Manwaring agrees that 'the country of Persia is far more pleasant for a stranger to live in than the Turks' country'.<sup>24</sup> Earlier travellers had also often noted that the Turks could be virulently anti-Christian. The remarks of Harry Cavendish, who travelled to Istanbul in 1589, clearly evoke the potential difficulties of being a Christian trader in Ottoman lands. Cavendish records that the Turks are 'rude and proud and veary malyshyous toward Crystans, tearming of them doges and offering them many abuses. Many them wear so malyshyous to Crystans that they would not sell us ther ware but waft us from them wythe ther hand'.<sup>25</sup>

European travellers to Persia also comment on the hostility that exists between the Turks and the Persians. Many note, like John Chardin later in the seventeenth century, that the Persians 'abominate' the faith of the Turks, and vice versa.<sup>26</sup> Pinçon, writing of his travels in Persia at the end of the previous century, used similar terms to express the enmity between the two: 'les Persans ont en grande abomination les Turcs, les reputant impurs en leur loy'.<sup>27</sup> The sectarian divide between the Shi'ite Safavid and Sunni Ottoman empires was not only recognised but even actively welcomed by some Europeans. As Dorothy Vaughan has noted, 'Persia's adherence to doctrines regarded in Turkey as heretical was in fact a leading cause of enmity

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in Jacobean England: the Sherley Brothers and the 'Voyage of Persia'", in Maquerlot J.-P. – Willems M. (eds.), *Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time* (Cambridge: 1996); Houston, "Thou glorious kingdome".

<sup>24</sup> William Parry, *A New and Large Discourse on the Travels of Sir Anthony Sherley Knight, by Sea, and over Land, to the Persian Empire* (London, Valentine Simmes: 1601) 18; Manwaring G., *A True Discourse of Sir Anthony Sherley's Travel Into Persia*, in Denison Ross (ed.), *Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure* 216–217.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Frazee C.A., *Catholics and Sultans: The Church and the Ottoman Empire, 1453–1923* (Cambridge: 1983) 72.

<sup>26</sup> John Chardin, *The Travels of Sir John Chardin into Persia and the East Indies* (London: 1686) 355.

<sup>27</sup> Abel Pinçon, *Relation d'un voyage de Perse Faict es Années 1598. & 1599*, in Morisot C.B. (ed.), *Relations Veritables et Cvrievses de l'Isle de Madagascar et du Bresil [...] et une du Royaume de Perse* (Paris, Augustin Courbé: 1651) 141.

between the two powers, so welcome in the west'.<sup>28</sup> Given the difficulties sometimes faced by Christian travellers in the Ottoman empire, it was perhaps natural that Persia should seem like an easier option in comparison. For a variety of reasons, mostly related to trade, Iran's links with Europe strengthened during the Safavid dynasty, and during the reign of Shah 'Abbās in particular.<sup>29</sup> Previous Safavid rulers may have been less hospitable; Anthony Jenkinson reports that, after he affirmed his belief in Christ during an audience with Shah Tahmasp I ('Abbās's grandfather), the shah called him an unbeliever and exclaimed, 'we have no need to have friendship with the unbelievers', obliging Jenkinson to depart.<sup>30</sup> It would appear that Shah 'Abbās had a particular interest in Christianity, and this is another important context for the rumours of his conversion.

### *Shah 'Abbās I and Christianity*

There was considerable movement of Christian minority groups into Iran during the Safavid period, when Christians were periodically imported from the Caucasus to supply the need for skilled craftsmen.<sup>31</sup> Under Shah 'Abbās's rule, certain surrounding regions, such as Georgia and Armenia, were devastated by the ongoing wars between the Ottomans and the Safavids, and their Christian populations were also deported to Iran.<sup>32</sup> In 1604, for example, a mass movement of population took place when 'Abbās obliged the inhabitants of Christian Armenia to resettle in various parts of Persia.<sup>33</sup> 'Abbās thus not only tolerated but actively encouraged the presence of certain minority groups of Christian origin. Christian immigrants were to become members of his harem, including one woman who was the daughter of a Georgian prince, and his own mother is reported to have been a Caucasian Christian.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, 'Abbās was known to be interested in

<sup>28</sup> Vaughan D.M., *Europe and the Turk: A Pattern of Alliances 1350–1700*, (Liverpool: 1954) 209.

<sup>29</sup> Blow, *Persia: Through Writers' Eyes* 84.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Blow, *Persia: Through Writers' Eyes* 94.

<sup>31</sup> Khanbaghi, *The Fire, the Star and the Cross* 94.

<sup>32</sup> Blow, *Persia: Through Writers' Eyes* 86.

<sup>33</sup> Waterfield R.E., *Christians in Persia: Assyrians, Armenians, Roman Catholics and Protestants* (London: 1973) 62–69.

<sup>34</sup> Khanbaghi, *The Fire, the Star and the Cross* 130.

Christian beliefs and practices, even attending some Armenian Christian celebrations, such as a river-blessing ceremony which took place near Isfahan.<sup>35</sup> He was friendly to the emissaries of Christian European states, and frequently entertained such travellers at his court.<sup>36</sup> Christians in Persia were granted some privileges, and Christian missionaries were successfully established; these missionaries obviously had close links with particular European powers, notably Spain and Portugal (the Augustinians) and the Papacy (the Carmelites).<sup>37</sup>

One report of 'Abbās's interest in this latter such group of missionaries demonstrates the degree to which he engaged directly with Christian people and ideas. Two Carmelite missions were dispatched to Persia by the Pope, in 1604 and 1621. During the second visit, a theological debate took place between 'Abbās, the Carmelite friars, and a group of English travellers who had with them a chaplain, described in the Carmelite report of the event as a Lutheran.<sup>38</sup> The three-way discussion focused on four main points: fasting and good works; use of images and the cross; free-will and predestination; and the question of authority. Every time the Carmelite friars and the English chaplain explained their views on each of these points – during which discussion the Carmelites had the advantage of being able to speak directly to 'Abbās in his own language, whilst the English used a translator – 'Abbās indicated his inclination towards the Catholic position.<sup>39</sup> His enjoyment in this kind of debate can be taken as typical of 'Abbās's interest in theological discussion and his willingness to listen to Christian arguments. This sympathy for and tolerance of Christians became known in Europe, and prompted further travellers to visit Persia, such as the Italian nobleman Pietro della Valle, who was interested (amongst other things) in protecting the indigenous Christian communities known to be living in the country.<sup>40</sup> Della Valle's initial perceptions of

<sup>35</sup> Waterfield, *Christians in Persia* 67.

<sup>36</sup> Welch, "Safavi Iran Seen Through Christian Eyes" 113.

<sup>37</sup> Vaughan, *Europe and the Turk* 209–10; Blow, *Persia: Through Writers' Eyes* 87.

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of this event, see Goddard H., *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, (Edinburgh: 2000) 118–20. For the Carmelite report, see *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries*, 2 vols. (London: 1939); the account of this incident is reprinted in McNeill W.H. – Waldman M.R. (eds.), *The Islamic World* (Oxford: 1973) 386–387.

<sup>39</sup> Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations* 119.

<sup>40</sup> Gurney J.D., "Pietro della Valle: the limits of perception", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 49 (1986), 103–116 (106). See also the edition and discussion of Della Valle's travelogue in Speelman R., "Uno sconosciuto 'West-Östlicher

Persia were positive; like others, he noted its superiority to the Ottoman empire, and was pleased with his reception at court and his initial perceptions of 'Abbās.<sup>41</sup> Della Valle also recorded 'Abbās's willingness to provoke and join in religious discussion.<sup>42</sup> In addition, 'Abbās seems to have been prepared to raise the prospect of strengthening Europe's links with Iran through the Christian minorities present in the country. Whilst in conflict with the Ottomans, and keen for European help, 'Abbās appears to have promoted the idea that he might enforce the submission of Christian minorities in Iran to Rome in return for Catholic support against the Turks.<sup>43</sup> The prospect of Persian conversion to Christianity is one which was to gain momentum in European perceptions of 'Abbās, as will shortly be discussed.

'Abbās's interest in Christianity and his tolerance of Christian minorities may have been more typical of the general attitudes and habits of Muslim countries than might be presumed. Nabil Matar has emphasised that Christianity was viewed by Arab Muslims as part of an Islamic legacy, rather than as a foreign religion, and that Christians were very much a part of the Muslim world. Muslim attitudes to Christianity – for example, their veneration of Christ, and the praise given in the Qu'ran to Christians' 'monastic piety and asceticism' – were clearly not uniformly hostile elsewhere.<sup>44</sup> 'Abbās's tolerance of Christian missionaries and travellers, however, was related to the specific position in which he found himself, and this also strengthened interest in his stance. Some of the clerical rulings made under 'Abbās's jurisdiction involved a greater flexibility in prescribing attitudes to other faiths, allowing Muslims who lived near Christians to mix freely with them and even to follow practices usually forbidden to Muslims, such as eating pork or drinking wine. Rula Jurdi Abisaab has speculated that such rulings may have been aimed at achieving greater social cohesion between Muslims and non-Muslim minorities.<sup>45</sup>

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Divan' di Pietro Della Valle", *Electronic Journal of Oriental Studies* V, 5 (2002), 1–37. Some of Della Valle's Persian letters are included in the edition by Gaeta F. and Lockhart L., *I viaggi di Pietro della Valle: Lettere dalla Persia* (Rome: 1972).

<sup>41</sup> Gurney, "Pietro della Valle: the limits of perception" 107.

<sup>42</sup> Gurney, "Pietro della Valle: the limits of perception" 107.

<sup>43</sup> Khanbaghi, *The Fire, the Star and the Cross* 124.

<sup>44</sup> Matar, *Europe Through Arab Eyes* 34–35.

<sup>45</sup> Abisaab R.J., *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London and New York: 2004) 67.

More important with reference to the treatment of Europeans was 'Abbās's desire to form military and links with European powers, particularly at the expense of the Ottomans. The prospect of a Christian-Persian alliance against the Ottoman empire had been raised since long before 'Abbās's reign, becoming a commonplace by the middle of the sixteenth century.<sup>46</sup> Various European powers were interested in uniting with the Persian shah against their mutual enemy.<sup>47</sup> Persian-Christian alliances could also be formed for purposes of trade, often at the expense of other Christian powers. Eskandar Beg Monshi, a secretary at 'Abbās's court who became the major Persian historian of his reign, specified occasions on which 'Abbās was interested in forming such alliances. One such example involved the help provided by the English in recapturing Hormuz from the Portuguese in 1622.<sup>48</sup> On this occasion, the East India Company provided the naval power needed to oust the Portuguese and establish an English trading base, thus satisfying both Persian and English desires.<sup>49</sup> The need to establish safe and profitable trading routes motivated English interest in Iran, and vice versa. As one English East India Company emissary recorded, Shah 'Abbās would be inclined to favour the English when he had fallen out with the Portuguese.<sup>50</sup> 'Abbās's interest in and tolerance of Christianity can thus be understood as part of his desire to forge links with European countries, both Catholic and Protestant, for trade and military purposes. This stance towards Christianity was to lead to considerable speculation about his own religious position, as the next section of this chapter will demonstrate.

### *Shah 'Abbās and the prospect of conversion*

'Abbās's openness to Christianity was noted with interest by European travellers, and it is perhaps unsurprising that some put two and two

<sup>46</sup> Vaughan, *Europe and the Turk* 207.

<sup>47</sup> Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* 108–109.

<sup>48</sup> Savory R. (trans.), *History of Shah 'Abbas the Great by Eskandar Beg Monshi*, (2 vols.; Boulder, CO: 1978) 2: 1202–1203.

<sup>49</sup> Blow, *Persia: Through Writers' Eyes* 87.

<sup>50</sup> Aldworth T., India Office Records E/3/3/163, Aldworth and Biddulph to East India Company 19 August 1614, quoted in Ferrier R.W., "The Terms and Conditions under which English Trade was Transacted with Safavid Persia", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 49 (1986): 48–66 (49).

together and swiftly made five. As early as 1598, one English traveller to Persia had reported a rumour that Persian Muslims 'shalbe of our beliefe' if ["Mortus Ali"] come not shortly'.<sup>51</sup> Several travellers refer to 'Abbās's respect for the figure of Christ. Abel Pinçon conveyed the respect with which the Persian shah viewed Christianity and the figure of Christ when he wrote that: 'Il porte toutesfois tousiours à son col vne croix sous sa chemise en reuerence & honneur qu'il porte à Iesus-Christ'.<sup>52</sup> This degree of 'reverence and honour' was noted with interest by travellers to Iran. William Parry, who published an account of his experiences there in 1601, reported of the Persians in general that 'theyr conceit of Christ is, that hee was a very great Prophet, and a most holy and religious man', though admittedly 'in no way comparable to *Mahomet*'.<sup>53</sup> Anthony Nixon, who wrote a pamphlet in 1607 about the Sherley brothers' travels in Persia, claimed that the shah 'lends such attentive eare' to the Christians that 'he may in time bee brought to become a Christian'.<sup>54</sup> A play based on Nixon's pamphlet and performed at the Curtain theatre in London in the same year ended with the character of 'Abbās or 'the Sophy' agreeing to allow Robert Sherley to build a Christian church, to permit the education of Christian children in their own faith, and even to stand as godfather for Sherley's new son.<sup>55</sup> During his time at the papal court as the shah's representative, Anthony Sherley (by now a Roman Catholic himself), reported his belief that 'Abbās's enthusiasm for Christianity was such that the whole of Iran might be brought over to Catholicism, and it appears that the Pope was led to believe that 'Abbās would indeed contemplate conversion.<sup>56</sup> It seems that the shah's tolerance of Christian minorities, missionaries and travellers, and his interest in Christian

<sup>51</sup> Duckett G., "Further observations concerning the state of Persia, taken in the foresayd fift voyage into those partes", in Hakluyt R., *The Prinicpal Navigations Voyages Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, ed. Masefield J., (8 vols., London: 1927) 2: 127.

<sup>52</sup> Abel Pinçon, *Relation d'un voyage de Perse* 140.

<sup>53</sup> William Parry, *A New and Large Discourse on the Travels of Sir Anthony Sherley* 24. This is a view which mirrors Duckett's statement that "Their opinion of Christ is, that he was an holy man and a great Prophet, but not like unto Mahumet" (Duckett, "Further observations concerning the state of Persia" 2:128).

<sup>54</sup> Anthony Nixon, *The Three English Brothers*, (London: 1607) sig. K4<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> Day J. – Rowley W. – Wilkins G., *The Travels of the Three English Brothers*, in Parr (ed.), *Three Renaissance Travel Plays* scene xiii.

<sup>56</sup> Blow D., *Shah Abbas: The Ruthless King Who Became an Iranian Legend* (London: 2009) 63; Waterfield R., *Christians in Persia* 61.



practices and ideas, could only be interpreted by his European visitors as a preparedness to embrace Christianity more fully.

The prospect of 'Abbās's conversion to the Christian faith was more than a possibility, according to some sources; indeed, it was reported as having already taken place by French pamphlets and letters dating from around 1605. The first of these pamphlets was printed in Paris and entitled *La Nouvelle Conversion du Roy de Perse. Avec la deffette de deux cents mil Turcs après sa Conversion*. It includes accounts of 'Abbās's military victories over the Turks, makes reference to Shah Ismā'īl I's conversion of his people to a different religion from that of the Ottomans, and suggests that Ismā'īl himself was on the verge of becoming a Christian. His descendant 'Abbās had apparently gone one step further and been baptised the previous Pentecost, having been 'poussé par un secret aiguillon du Ciel' and also impressed by the actions of a Jesuit priest. The prospect suggested by the pamphlet is that all of Persia will turn Christian, as 'Abbās has ordered his subjects to accept baptism. The presence of a Christian force in the East is clearly seen within the context of an anti-Turkish alliance, as well as serving to achieve 'l'augmentation de l'Eglise Catholique', and the pamphlet has obvious Jesuit leanings.<sup>57</sup> A second pamphlet, *Histoire Veritable de la Grande at admirable deffaite de l'armée du Turc, avec la perte de soixante mille hommes, par Simon Siech Satrape de Suze, cousin du grand Sophi de Perse* was printed in Paris a decade later, and made a passing reference to 'Abbās's acceptance of Christianity. Here, 'Abbās 'faict un membre d'une mesme Eglise avec nous, ayant despuis quelque temps gousté le doux miel de la foy Chrestienne'.<sup>58</sup> Similar references to 'Abbās's conversion can also be found in the contemporary writings of Remacle de Mohy, Bishop of Liège, and in a series of letters published in Liège by the Ardennais scholar Mohy du Rondchamp.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *La Nouvelle Conversion du Roy de Perse. Avec la deffette de deux cents mil Turcs après sa Conversion*, (Paris: 1606) 5v, 6r–6v.

<sup>58</sup> [Ismael S.,] *Histoire Veritable de la Grande at admirable deffaite de l'armée du Turc*, (Paris, N. Rousset: 1615) 5.

<sup>59</sup> Knobler A., "Pseudo-Conversions and Patchwork Pedigrees: The Christianization of Muslim Princes and the Diplomacy of Holy War", *Journal of World History* 7, 2 (1996) 181–197 (194). Compare also the account given in [Boitel P.,] *Histoire Veritable de tout ce qui s'est faict & passé en Perse, depuis les Ceremonies du Baptesme du Grand Sophy* (Paris: 1616), in which the shah is reported to have been baptised in 1614.

These textual confirmations of ‘Abbās’s conversion to Christianity made real the possibility that was hinted at by writers such as Duckett and Nixon. They perhaps also drew on the fact that some Persians had been known to convert from Islam whilst travelling in Spain. A number of Anthony Sherley’s Iranian companions, who joined him on his visit to Spain on the shah’s behalf, were known to have become Christians there. One Iranian, for example, the son of a sultan, had been baptised at Valladolid, with the Queen of Spain herself standing as his sponsor.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, ‘Abbās had accepted a gift of a printed copy of the Gospels from the Carmelite missionaries in Isfahan, and he was known not to adhere to every tenet of the Muslim faith, as understood by his Christian visitors; he drank wine, for example, and did not abide by all of the decrees of his religious scholars.<sup>61</sup> Such activities, alongside his interest in Christianity, were typically enough evidence for European travellers to speculate about the possibility of a Muslim’s conversion. Indeed, interest in Christianity alone was enough to promote such speculation. Pietro della Valle, for example, encountered a mullā at Lar, Zayn al-Dīn, who seemed open to Western ideas and enjoyed discussions of Christian theology. On this basis, della Valle thought it might be possible to convert the mullā, but he was obliged to give the idea up when he realised that the man remained a devout Muslim despite his interest in Christianity.<sup>62</sup>

European interest in the shah’s conversion can also be read within the wider context of past and contemporary efforts at converting Persian and Muslim rulers. One tale which appeared in a number of medieval European chronicles was that of ‘Caesarea’, a Persian queen who made a secret trip to Constantinople to be baptised. The story goes that when the Persian king heard of this, he ordered that she return home, but the queen told his ambassadors that she would not do so until her husband had also converted. The king at once set out for Constantinople in the company of 40,000 of his men; all were baptised, and the king and queen returned together to Persia as Christians. This tale is reported by the fifteenth-century historian Platina in his *Lives of the Popes* as having taken place in 683 CE; the Latin chronicler Fredegar dates it to around 587. In both of these versions, the narrative occurs before the introduction of Islam to Persia; but in other accounts, such

<sup>60</sup> Waterfield, *Christians in Persia* 61; Blow, *Shah ‘Abbas* 63.

<sup>61</sup> Welch, “Safavi Iran Seen Through Christian Eyes” 104; Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 68.

<sup>62</sup> Gurney, “Pietro della Valle: the Limits of Perception”, 112.

as Paul the Deacon's *History of the Lombards*, it happens after that event. Such stories were used in the late fifteenth century to inspire Christian crusades; the suggestion that Persia was historically a Christian land was useful to those who wished to motivate a new crusade in the East.<sup>63</sup> There is a direct parallel between this fifteenth-century attempt to gather support for crusades against Islam by promoting the notion its rulers had converted to Christianity in the past, and the seventeenth-century interest in spreading the rumour that the current ruler might also be considering conversion. European merchants and travellers, such as those involved in the missions of the Sherley brothers, clearly had a vested interest in promoting the idea that 'Abbās might convert. In doing so they sought to strengthen the prospect of European-Persian alliances and to emphasise that Christians who travelled to and traded with Persia would be made welcome.

There is also evidence of other attempts to convert Islamic rulers to Christianity which throws some interesting light on the speculations surrounding 'Abbās. Perhaps the best known of these attempts is Pope Pius II's letter to the Ottoman ruler Mehmed III, discussed by Matthew Dimmock and Andrew Hadfield, and Nancy Bisaha, amongst others.<sup>64</sup> Pius's letter, written in 1461, asks Mehmed whether he is interested in converting to Christianity, appealing to traditions common to both faiths and the Islamic veneration of Christ. In this sense, the letter creates a sense of harmony between the two faiths; as Dimmock and Hadfield state, 'there is a recognition that the religions of the book share the same language and that proper communication can easily exist if terms can be established'. However, as Dimmock and Hadfield also recognise, Pius's approach to Mehmed is 'hardly a neutral one'.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, it could be interpreted as implicitly hostile, especially given Pius's previous efforts to amass Christian powers against the Ottomans. Bisaha suggests that the letter was never intended for a Muslim audience, and speculates that it might even be read as an anti-Islamic polemic, 'edify[ing] fellow Christians on the dangers of succumbing to Islam'.<sup>66</sup> As a conversion treatise, Pius's letter seems both ill-informed

<sup>63</sup> Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought* 120–122.

<sup>64</sup> Dimmock – Hadfield, *The Religions of the Book* Introduction; Bisaha N., "Pius II's letter to Sultan Mehmed II: A Re-examination", *Crusades* 1 (2002) 183–201; Bisaha N., *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (Philadelphia: 2004) 147–152.

<sup>65</sup> Dimmock – Hadfield, *The Religions of the Book* 3.

<sup>66</sup> Bisaha, *Creating East and West* 152.

about Islam and flippant about Christian baptism.<sup>67</sup> As Bisaha shows, Pius's overture to Mehmed, whether sincerely meant or not, was one of a number of efforts to convert Muslims in the middle ages and early Renaissance periods.<sup>68</sup>

The two French pamphlets take this impetus a step further by stating that 'Abbās has already made the transition from Muslim to Christian. They suggest the achievement of what must have been a Christian fantasy, that one of the Muslim world's most prominent rulers and his subjects would be transformed into a Christian prince and nation. Clearly, European travellers were interested in emphasising and exploiting the possibilities raised by 'Abbās's interest in their faith. An important context for this activity is the history of efforts made towards a proposed alliance between European powers and Persia against their mutual Ottoman enemies.<sup>69</sup> Although these proposals ultimately came to nothing,<sup>70</sup> various European powers expressed an interest in forming alliances with Persia during 'Abbās's reign. Thus interest in 'Abbās's conversion can be related to interest in the possibility that he might be pro-European in other ways.

There is no evidence that any of 'Abbās's European visitors suggested directly to the shah that he might consider converting to Christianity. (One contemporary letter from Pope Clement VIII to a Christian woman in 'Abbās's harem encourages her to help achieve 'Abbās's conversion to the Christian faith, but does not approach the shah in person.)<sup>71</sup> Perhaps, as with the case of Pietro della Valle and Zayn al-Dīn, this was because those who had contact with 'Abbās knew that he was also reputed to be a devout Muslim, and a spiritual and pious man, according to his historian Eskandar Beg Monshi.<sup>72</sup> Della Valle, who had initially been impressed by 'Abbās's willingness to enter Christian debates, soon became frustrated with his arrogant confidence in his own views and his lack of real knowledge, typified by his argument that Ali, St. George and St. James the Great were in fact

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<sup>67</sup> Bisaha, *Creating East and West* 151.

<sup>68</sup> Bisaha, *Creating East and West* 136–143.

<sup>69</sup> Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids* 108–109; Brummett P., *Ottoman Seapower and Levantine Diplomacy in the Age of Discovery* (New York: 1994) 31.

<sup>70</sup> Blow, *Persia: Through Writers' Eyes* 87.

<sup>71</sup> *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries* 1: 88.

<sup>72</sup> Savory (trans.), *History of Shah 'Abbas the Great by Eskandar Beg Monshi* 1:151.

one and the same person.<sup>73</sup> ‘Abbās may have enjoyed drinking wine, but he was engaged with and promoted public Shi’ite Muslim ceremonies and rituals, as part of his continued efforts to maintain Iran’s Shi’ite identity.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, his toleration of Christian travellers and minority groups in his territories did not mean that he welcomed all Christians or allowed all minority groups to practice their own religion freely. On the contrary, ‘Abbās frequently used forced conversion to Islam as a political measure. After the recapture of Hormuz, he ‘initiated a wave of conversion from Christianity to Islam’, and also converted Armenian communities, in a bid ‘to ensure the community’s overall loyalty to the empire’.<sup>75</sup> Whilst ‘Abbās tolerated some Christian minorities, he also forced large numbers of Armenian men and boys living in Iran to convert to Islam. Such converts could go on to become prosperous and successful merchants, but were often known as ‘slaves’.<sup>76</sup> Clearly ‘Abbās was prepared to entertain Christians when he needed to, but he was by no means universally welcoming of Christians in Iran. He, too, seems to have exploited the possibilities of seeming pro-Christian. This is suggested by the disenchanted comment of the Carmelite John Thaddeus, whose Persian translation of the psalms was presented as a gift to ‘Abbās in 1616 but who ultimately refuted the idea that the shah would hold any faith other than that of Islam: ‘As to the character of the King, at heart he is a Muslim and all he has done in the past has been feigned’.<sup>77</sup> As ‘Abbās began to win land back from the Ottomans under his own steam, his need of Christian support diminished. As the leader of the Carmelite mission, Father Paul Simon, wrote to the Pope as early as 1607: ‘All I can inform your Holiness is that the King of Persia is very powerful and no longer has need of Christian princes to help him’.<sup>78</sup>

### *Conclusions*

The speculation by European travellers over ‘Abbās’s interest in Christianity and possible conversion to that religion demonstrates the

<sup>73</sup> Gurney “Pietro della Valle: the Limits of Perception” 107.

<sup>74</sup> Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 68, 57–58.

<sup>75</sup> Abisaab, *Converting Persia* 68, 80.

<sup>76</sup> Blow, *Persia: Through Writers’ Eyes* 86.

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in Waterfield, *Christians in Persia* 65.

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Waterfield, *Christians in Persia* 65.

difficulty they experienced in making sense of a ruler who was at once clearly a Muslim, and interested in and tolerant of other faiths. It is likely that English travellers, for example, themselves accustomed to a society in which only one religion was permitted to be practised openly, misjudged the significance of the shah's tolerance of the open practice of Christianity. Christianity in general was perhaps less interested in incorporating other faiths, and less successful at doing so, than was Islam. The Muslim attitude to Christ is a good example of the contrast between each faith's capacity for incorporating the other. In Muslim countries in north Africa, for example, where many Muslims read Christian books, mosques were named after Christ, who was venerated as a prophet.<sup>79</sup> Such veneration was emphatically not exhibited by Christians towards Muhammad.<sup>80</sup> Traditionally, Christians had viewed Islam as a deviant form of Christianity; such a tradition made it difficult for Christian travellers to make sense of a religion which took such a different approach to incorporating other faiths.<sup>81</sup>

The rumours about 'Abbās's conversion and the interest in Iran's tolerance of Christianity also reflect how the religious status of Iran and 'Abbās became caught up in the wider contest between European powers during this period. As different European factions sought to develop trade and military links with Iran, 'Abbās's religious identity functioned as a cipher through which European travellers could express Iran's openness to Christianity and suitability for the establishment of European trading posts. Here, religious status becomes a metaphor for the prospect of trading and political alliances. In the functioning of this cipher or metaphor, the divide between Catholicism and Protestantism was clearly significant. It was impossible for English travellers to claim outright that 'Abbās was considering a conversion to Protestantism; such a move was obviously not in prospect, however much English travellers hinted that Islam as practised in Iran was closer to Protestantism to Catholicism.<sup>82</sup> Thus, given that the Sherley brothers sought to promote European-Persian links in the Catholic courts of Europe as well as in Protestant England, Robert Sherley was not in

<sup>79</sup> Matar, *Europe Through Arab Eyes* 32.

<sup>80</sup> Matar, *Europe Through Arab Eyes* 33–35.

<sup>81</sup> Fletcher R., *The Cross and the Crescent: The Dramatic Story of the Earliest Encounters Between Christians and Muslims* (London: 2003) 158.

<sup>82</sup> Anthony Parr notes that several features of Shi'a Islam, including the burning of images, might be expected to appeal to English Protestants; see Parr A., "Foreign relations" 21.

a position to suggest to James I that 'Abbās's interest in trading with England meant that he would not also court the Catholics.

The three-way debate held between 'Abbās, the Carmelites and the English travellers in 1621 typifies the fact that 'Abbās was prepared to negotiate with whomsoever he thought would be of most direct benefit. During this debate, as mentioned above, 'Abbās frequently sided with the Catholics on matters of faith, such as fasting, making the sign of the cross and the primacy of the Pope. On matters of diplomacy, however, the shah was inclined to favour the English, who were then attempting to build interests in the Iranian silk trade. The English, 'Abbās said, had been useful to him, had not lied, and had carried out their promises, whereas the Pope had not gone to war against the Turks, despite the King of Spain and Portugal's promise that Catholic Europe would do so.<sup>83</sup> 'Abbās was clearly prepared to share certain points of faith with one group of Europeans, but to favour the diplomatic practices of another in terms of his own political priorities. As Hugh Goddard has noted, this 'reflects a situation where it is no longer a case of Christians on one side and Muslims on the other, but some Christians and some Muslims on one side and other Christians and other Muslims on the other'.<sup>84</sup> This state of affairs is highlighted by the reference in *La Nouvelle Conversion du Roy de Perse* to the nationality of the Jesuit priest who is instrumental in 'Abbās's supposed conversion. The author notes that the Jesuit concerned was in fact English, and 'parent de ce grand Aymon Campian [Edmund Campion]', who had been 'martyrisé' by Elizabeth I. It is significant that the agent of 'Abbās's conversion to Catholicism should be described by the French author as an Englishman. Under these conditions, the divisions within faiths became as important as those between faiths. This separation between different elements of Christian Europe was known to be one of the reasons why 'Abbās himself mistrusted agreements made with European powers. Anthony Sherley had noted that the disagreements between different Christian groups had influenced 'Abbās's view of the likelihood that Persian-Christian alliances would succeed: 'their own disunion amongst themselves gaue him small hope of any great good effect in what he should propound vnto them'.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations* 119–120.

<sup>84</sup> Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations* 120.

<sup>85</sup> Anthony Sherley, *A True Report of Sir A Sherlies Journey* (London, R.B[lower]: 1600) 113. Waterfield notes that 'the dissensions within the Christian body were

The sectarian division within Christianity was mirrored by the divide between Sunnism and Shi'ism in Muslim countries. The fact that Iran and 'Abbās adhered to a different sort of Islam from the Ottomans made it possible for Europeans to see them as potential allies, on the principle of 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'.<sup>86</sup> 'Abbās and Safavid Iran can thus be placed within a long line of Eastern rulers and countries which became the focus of rumours that they might turn Christian.<sup>87</sup> The bitter hostilities between the Safavids and the Ottomans, and 'Abbās's stringent campaigns against his neighbours, in which he won back land from Ottoman control, were significant in influencing Christian perspectives. This anti-Ottoman activity created a space in which 'Abbās, though Muslim himself, could simultaneously be seen as anti-Muslim in European eyes. As such he was a religious hybrid, both Muslim and anti-Turk; it is this hybrid status which translated for some European travellers into a preparedness for Christianity. If 'Abbās was not a 'Turk', then there was a possibility that he could be a Christian.

It is evident that religious identity in the early modern period could be used and manipulated in complex ways. Conversion, as Matthew Dimmock and Andrew Hadfield have argued, played an important part in confirming religious identity: 'Conversion – for Christian, Jew or Muslim – thus became an exemplary moment, explicitly, physically and visually confirming a theological status quo'.<sup>88</sup> However, as Dimmock and Hadfield also note, 'the identity of the convert was always a complex one, questioning even while affirming the religion converted to'.<sup>89</sup> This brief examination of speculation about the conversion of Shah 'Abbās I has demonstrated that the convert's status could be complex even when the convert in question was not really a convert at all.

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perhaps ultimately the most serious disincentives to the spread of the Christian religion' in *Christians in Persia* 64.

<sup>86</sup> Blow, *Shah 'Abbas*.

<sup>87</sup> Such as Tīmūr; see Knobler A., "Pseudo-Conversions and Patchwork Pedigrees" 190–191.

<sup>88</sup> Dimmock – Hadfield, *The Religions of the Book* 13.

<sup>89</sup> Dimmock – Hadfield, *The Religions of the Book* 13–14.



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## NARRATING CONVERSION AND SUBJECTHOOD IN THE VENETIAN-OTTOMAN BORDERLANDS\*

E. Natalie Rothman

In 1608, a rather unusual petition reached the Venetian Senate: Teodoro Dandolo, born under the Safavids in the Uzbek city of Bukhara, asked to be appointed interpreter of Persian, Turkish, Arabic, and 'Indian'. About eight years prior, around 1600, Dandolo had migrated from Bukhara to Aleppo, where he had met Vincenzo Dandolo, the Venetian consul there (1598–1602). At the consul's behest, he traveled to Venice and was baptized. Shortly after, the new convert relocated again, this time to Rome, where he spent the next four years in the household of Cardinal San Giorgio, Cinzio Aldobrandini (1551–1610).<sup>1</sup> Now, upon returning to Venice, he sought employment as a Public Dragoman (official interpreter for Ottoman merchants and dignitaries in Venice), so that he could support himself.<sup>2</sup> The members of the Venetian Board of Trade, to whom the case was referred for consultation, were divided. Two of them doubted Dandolo's skills as a translator and writer in Italian. But given his precociousness ('essendo lui de spirito vivo, et de ingegno pronto'), they recommended that he be placed under the tutelage of the acting Public Dragoman for training. A third member of the Board was far less enthusiastic about employing Dandolo in the delicate position of dragoman:

Having been born a Muslim, even though he has become a Christian, he could always have some greater inclination towards his nation, and since he is not Your [i.e. Venetian] subject, and has lived for many years

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\* This chapter elaborates on an earlier and slightly different version of the text, to be published in Rothman E. N., *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca: 2011).

<sup>1</sup> Aldobrandini was the nephew of Pope Clement VIII, a Spanish sympathizer and an influential courtier in Rome. See Rota G., "Religious Conversion and Professional Rivalry in Venice: Two cases from the 17th Century" [unpublished] 2 and passim for this and other details of Teodoro Dandolo's biography. I thank Giorgio Rota for sharing with me this unpublished paper and much information about Dandolo.

<sup>2</sup> Archivio di Stato di Venezia (henceforth: ASVe), Cinque Savii, Risposte, box 142, fols. 83v–84v (June 23, 1608 & Aug. 18, 1608).

in the house of the Illustrious Signor Cardinal San Giorgio, it could be feared that he might continue to serve, and have affection for him, and from what can be understood from the outside he is not very constant in his actions.<sup>3</sup>

Although the Board continuously struggled to find qualified dragomans, it could not agree on Dandolo's merit. While some of its members challenged the applicant's competence, others questioned his trustworthiness. Neither his conversion nor his linguistic promise sufficed to assuage fears over his Muslim birth in a faraway country, foreign juridical status, and Papal patron. Like many converts, Dandolo was embedded in extra-Venetian networks of patronage that were essential for his new social persona, but that also cast a perennial doubt about his loyalty. Four months after its initial report, the Board of Trade's composition changed, and the new members decided to appoint Dandolo as interpreter, citing the frequent absence from the city of acting Public Dragoman Giacomo de Nores, and a successful occasion on which Dandolo assisted the Board to communicate with a group of Armenian merchants. Dandolo's appointment, however, does not appear to have ever materialized. His name does not show up again in the archives until 1615, when the Board of Trade approved his request to become commercial broker 'of Turks and Levantines' and provided him with a booklet in which to keep record of all his transactions with 'the Turkish, Greek, and Jewish nations, and other Levantine merchants'. The brevity of the Board's response on that date, which repeated almost verbatim its 1608 reply, suggests that Dandolo had not been in its service in the intervening period.<sup>4</sup>

While Dandolo's case may seem exceptionally complicated, it reflects broader uncertainty about the juridico-political entailments of Muslim-Christian conversion in early modern Venice. As I argue, the systemic distrust of Muslim converts to Christianity stemmed, in part

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<sup>3</sup> 'Essendo questo nato Turco, se ben fatto christiano, sempre potria haver qualche maggior inclinazione alla sua nazione, no[n] essendo suddito suo, come anco p[er] esser vissuto molti anni nella casa dell'Ill.mo S[igno]r Gardenal S. Giorgio, co'l quale si potria dubitare che potessi continuar nella servitu, et affettion sua poi che p[er] quanto esteriormente si puo comprender lui no[n] è molto stabile nelle sue attioni': ASVe, Cinque Savii, Risposte, box 142, fol. 84v (Aug. 18, 1608).

<sup>4</sup> ASVe, Cinque Savii, Risposte, box 142, fols. 95r-v (Dec. 6, 1608) and box 144, fols. 31r-v (Feb. 14, 1614 m.v.); Ufficio della Bolla Ducale, Grazie del Maggior Consiglio, reg. 8, fol. 76 (Sept. 23, 1615); Cinque Savii, Seconda serie, box 4, file 47, unpaginated (Sept. 28, 1615).

at least, from Venetian efforts to understand contemporary Ottoman practices of conversion. In a nutshell, Venetians came to view Ottoman subjects' supposed single-minded devotion to the sultan through the dual emergent lens of confessionalization and Oriental despotism, thus translating the Ottoman state's patronage of converts into a conception of Ottoman subjectivity as obviating individual will in matters of religio-political affiliation.<sup>5</sup>

This article addresses the presumed relationship between confessional identity and juridical subjecthood in early modern Venetian narratives of conversion from Islam to Christianity and from Christianity to Islam (and to a lesser extent: conversion to Catholicism from Judaism and Protestantism). It suggests how the process of conversion, and converts' subjectivity itself, were differently articulated in various textual genres, including reports penned by Venetian diplomats in Istanbul about renegades who had 'Turned Turk', inquisitorial depositions by Muslim and Protestant subjects who sought reconciliation with the Church, and converts' baptismal records and matrimonial examinations. Using Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope (space-time frame), it identifies two prototypical accounts of the spatiotemporal process of conversion, prevalent in narratives of conversion to Catholicism from Ottoman Islam and from Protestantism, respectively, and argues for the key role of Venetian institutions and intermediaries in articulating both. In closing, it considers how divergent assumptions about continuity and discontinuity of the convert's intending self relate to contemporary notions of gendered and confessional subjecthood.

As is well known, St. Augustine's *Confessions* envisioned two separate stages of conversion. One, emphasized by many medieval Christian theologians, is a dramatic and singular moment of revelation, in which the self is radically transformed and created anew. According to historian Elisheva Carlebach

Medieval religious usage borrowed the term *conversion* from the al/chemical sciences as a metaphor, in which one substance was changed into something utterly different by a mysterious process. Conceptions of transformation or rebirth had always informed the imagery of Christian

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<sup>5</sup> On Venetian notions of Ottoman political order, servility, and volition, see Valensi L., "The Making of a Political Paradigm: The Ottoman State and Oriental Despotism", in Grafton A. – Blair A. (eds.), *The Transmission of Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia: 1990) 182 and passim.

conversion. In conversion to Christianity, divine grace transfigured the soul, created it anew, so that no residue of the earlier self remained.<sup>6</sup>

Post-Tridentine conversion policies still featured many elements which both assumed and sought to reinforce this notion of radical transformation at the baptismal font through the convert's complete severance of previous social and kinship ties.<sup>7</sup>

Yet Augustine's *Confessions* also described conversion as a lifelong process of self-exercise, striving, and gradual adaptation. This image of conversion recalls a journey that starts well before baptism, and continues thereafter.<sup>8</sup> It is likely this understanding of conversion as a lifelong process that led Venetian administrators who dealt with converts tacitly to acknowledge converts' ongoing ties with their unconverted kin. Indeed, such ties were sometimes encouraged, seen as a key financial and emotional resource in safeguarding converts' wellbeing, and as a first step towards converting additional family members.<sup>9</sup> Tolerance of such ties could be interpreted as de facto recognition of converts' ongoing embeddedness in preexisting social relations, linking their presents with their pasts.

Ottoman Muslim notions of religious conversion also often such continuity presupposed. As in Venice, conversion to Islam in the early modern Ottoman Empire was not practiced as a moment of rupture

<sup>6</sup> Carlebach E., *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany, 1500–1750* (New Haven: 2001) 1.

<sup>7</sup> Stow K.R., *Catholic Thought and Papal Jewry Policy, 1555–1593* (New York: 1976); Ravid B., "The Forced Baptism of Jewish Minors in Early-Modern Venice", *Italia* 13–15 (2001) 2001. However, as Elisheva Carlebach herself cogently shows, converts' claims to have completely severed their ties with family also stemmed from their 'need to appeal to Christian charity. Orphaned from the community that had nurtured them, they appealed for financial support as well as social acceptance to their adoptive community'. See Carlebach, *Divided Souls* 24.

<sup>8</sup> On the two meanings/stages of conversion in Augustine, see Outler A.C., "Introduction", in Augustine, *Confessions and Enchiridion* (London: 1955) 19 and passim; Riley P., *Character and Conversion in Autobiography: Augustine, Montaigne, Descartes, Rousseau, and Sartre* (Charlottesville: 2004) 24–25 and passim.

<sup>9</sup> On such lingering ties, see, for Venice, Pullan B.S., *The Jews of Europe and the Inquisition of Venice, 1550–1670* (Totowa, NJ: 1983) 275–293; for Rome, Sermoneta G.B., "Il mestiere del neofito nella Roma del Settecento", in Oppenheimer A. (ed.), *Shlomo Simonsohn Jubilee Volume* (Tel Aviv: 1993) 213–243; Stow K.R., "A Tale of Uncertainties: Converts in the Roman Ghetto", in Oppenheimer A. (ed.), *Shlomo Simonsohn Jubilee Volume* (Tel Aviv: 1993) 257–281; Idem, "Neofiti' and Their Families; Or, Perhaps, the Good of the State", *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 47 (2002) 105–113.



requiring the severance of one's former ties.<sup>10</sup> A host of practices that developed in Venice in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to integrate new converts into society – such as rapid baptism following only nominal catechization, and financial and material support for converts – bear striking similarities to Ottoman ones, in contrast to Papal Post-Tridentine dogma.

How are we to account for the significant parallels and convergences between seventeenth-century Ottoman Muslim and Venetian Catholic practices of conversion? In order to begin addressing this complex question we need to look at the specific institutional and intellectual contexts of conversion in these two polities, as well as at the degree of overlap and interaction between them. At the outset, it should be recognized that conversion practices were shaped not only by the awakened religious sentiments of the Age of Confessionalization, but also by the political and economic exigencies of a changing Mediterranean. In particular, the need – recognized by many Venetian patricians – to maintain friendly relations with the Ottomans in the face of growing economic competition from Dutch, French, and English naval powers often produced less than enthusiastic responses to Muslims seeking Christian conversion. It also sometimes led to acquiescence in the face of Venetians who had converted to Islam. How, exactly, Catholic conversion was articulated in different Venetian institutional sites, and what relationship the narratives produced in these variegated contexts bore to emerging notions of Ottoman political and religious alterity is the subject of this essay.

### *Capturing Renegades*

One of the dominant contexts of conversion to Islam in the early modern Venetian-Ottoman borderlands intimately linked the process of becoming Muslim with a radical shift in political subjectivity. The *devşirme* (child levy) system served to harness the loyalty of young recruits to the Ottoman imperial centre. Ideally, if not always in practice,

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<sup>10</sup> Krstić T., *Narrating Conversions to Islam: The Dialogue of Texts and Practices in Early Modern Ottoman Balkans* (Unpublished dissertation, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor: 2004); see also, albeit for a later period, Deringil S., “‘There Is No Compulsion in Religion’: On Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire: 1839–1856”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, 3 (2000) 554.

it made religious conversion part of a process of juridical transformation of subjects from free members of the Ottoman Empire's Christian provincial periphery to unfree member of the empire's military-administrative core.<sup>11</sup> We now know that the overwhelming majority of converts to Islam in the early modern Ottoman Empire were not child recruits, and that many subjects of neighboring polities entered the Sultan's service and became Muslim under circumstances that had little to do with physical coercion. These subjects became known as 'renegades'. Significantly, it was the image of these 'renegades' which – just like that of the *devşirme* recruits – became a paradigmatic model of Ottoman religious conversion by fusing the notion of 'becoming Muslim' with a transformation in juridical status and a new level of political submission to the Sultan.

It is thus hardly surprising that early modern Venetian elites viewed subjects who had 'turned Turk' with deep suspicion. Indeed, Venetian officials in Istanbul and throughout the Eastern Mediterranean who reported on such cases took it for granted that Venetian subjects who had embraced Islam thereby relinquished their ties of loyalty to the Venetian state. A variety of genres dramatized this transition, linking the profession of Muslim faith by non-Ottoman Christians – whether seen as instrumental and opportunistic or coerced – with rapid integration into an Ottoman (metropolitan) milieu. From ransomed slaves' reconciliation narratives in front of the Inquisition, through diplomatic reports from Istanbul, to rumors and folk songs about 'renegades', the understanding of Muslim converts in early modern Venice unambiguously coupled the transition from Christianity to Islam with political and juridical submission to the Sultan. Gianfrancesco Morosini, who served as Venetian bailo in Istanbul from late summer 1582 to summer 1585 articulated this sentiment upon his return to Venice:

The renegades are all slaves, and are proud to be able to say, 'I am a slave of the Grand Signor!' For it is known that it [the Ottoman Empire] is the dominion or the republic of slaves, where it is they who are in command. The other Turks, even though they are not slaves like these [the renegades], might as well be considered such, and they consider it an honor to be called by that name [...]<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> On the *devşirme* see Imber C., *The Ottoman Empire, 1300–1650: The Structure of Power* (Houndmills: 2002) 140–142; Minkov A., *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kısve Bahası Petitions and Ottoman Social Life, 1670–1730* (Leiden – Boston: 2004).

<sup>12</sup> 'Li rinegati sono tutti schiavi, e tengono per grandezza il poter dire: Io sono schiavo del Gran Signore; poichè si sa che quello è il dominio o la repubblica de' schiavi,

Several reversals are at work in Morosini's statement: Ottoman subjects' supposed preference for servility over freedom is compounded by the travesty – particularly from a Venetian patrician's point of view – of a republic governed by slaves.<sup>13</sup> These political aberrations, Morosini implies, are at least in part the result of another one: the Ottomans' perceived failure to distinguish between 'original' and naturalized subjects, and clear preference for parvenus at the expense of 'old Muslims' from the heartland. Earlier in the text, Morosini explains that

There are two types of Turks. One consists of those who are native-born of Turkish parents, while the other is made up of renegades who are sons of Christian parents, taken by force in the raids which the fleets and the irregular troops customarily carry out in Christian lands, or else they are from among the Signor's subjects and tax-payers, removed by force from their own village. These, while still children, are circumcised and made Turks either by enticements or by force [...]<sup>14</sup>

We will come back to Morosini's definition of the renegade in a moment. But first, we may well pause on the category of 'Turk'. In early modern Italian, as in other contemporary European languages, 'Turco' could mean simultaneously an Ottoman subject, an ethnic Turk, a Muslim, or any combination of the above. At first glance, this conflation seems like a misrepresentation of what are now

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dove loro hanno da comandare; li altri Turchi, sebbene non sono schiavi come questi, nondimeno si possono essi ancora tener per tali, e si reputano ad onore di esser chiamati con questo nome, specialmente quelli che sono adoperati nel servizio del Gran Signore nelli carichi che ho detto di sopra'; Albèri E., *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato. Serie III: Le relazioni degli stati ottomani* vol. III (Florence: 1855) 267. English translation adapted from Davis J.C., ed., *Pursuit of Power: Venetian Ambassadors' Reports on Spain, Turkey, and France in the Age of Philip II, 1560–1600* (New York: 1970) 139. Giovanni Botero was to repeat this argument almost verbatim in his *Relationi Universali* (1591–1601), when he wrote that the Sultan's slaves 'thinke it as great an honour so be stiled, and so to live, as they do with us, who serve in the highest places of Princes Courts'. Almost two centuries later, Montesquieu was to argue that the Ottoman state was an 'empire of slaves'. See Çirakman A., 2001. "From Tyranny to Despotism: The Enlightenment's Unenlightened Image of the Turks", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, 1 (2001) 52, 63.

<sup>13</sup> The trope of Ottoman subjects as slaves was longstanding in Venetian political discourse. For additional examples from earlier and contemporary diplomatic reports from Istanbul, see Libby L.J., "Venetian Views of the Ottoman Empire from the Peace of 1503 to the War of Cyprus", *Sixteenth Century Journal* 9, 4 (1978) 117–120.

<sup>14</sup> 'Delli turchi se ne ritrovano di due sorte; l'una di quelli che sono naturali nati di padri turchi, e l'altra di rinegati, che sono figliuoli di padri cristiani, presi violentemente nelle depredazioni che sogliono fare le armate e li leventi in paesi cristiani, ovvero levati dal proprio paese per forza di mano de' sudditi e carzeri di quel Signor, li quali da fanciulli sono o per lusinghe o per forza ritagliati e fatti turchi': Albèri, *Relazioni* 263–264.

analytically distinct categories. It certainly speaks to a Venetian's (or a Briton's) inability to imagine Christian Ottoman subjects as truly 'Ottoman', or foreign recruits as constituting the administrative core of the empire. But in light of Morosini's definition, we may also understand this conflation of language, religion, and juridical subjecthood rather as an attempt – misinformed, to be sure – to come to terms with the Ottoman state's perceived indifference to ethnicity, and with the Ottomans' own conflation of religious and political affiliation, at least as far as the making of bureaucratic-military elites was concerned. As we will see, these conflations – in both their Ottoman and Venetian articulations – helped shape enduring ideas about conversion and converthood.

Going back to the figure of 'the renegade', although Morosini had in mind the *devşirme* recruits, his explication of the category in fact mentions both the child levy in the Ottoman Empire's Christian villages and 'the raids which the fleets and the irregular troops customarily conduct on Christian lands'. In other words, 'renegades' in this context include both Ottoman Christian subjects' children-made-conscripts and non-Ottoman subjects forced into slavery by corsairs. Significantly, this gloss excludes – or at least fails to mention – the numerous subjects who became Muslim not under conditions of slavery or physical coercion.<sup>15</sup> The figure of the 'renegade' thus sidestepped volition and intentionality from the process of conversion, focusing instead on violence and coercion, and conflated the act of joining a new confession with juridical submission.

This conflation is evinced, among others, in references to 'renegades' in Venetian diplomatic correspondence. A letter from the Venetian Senate to the bailo in Istanbul in May 1629 refers to the malevolent intentions and deeds of a renegade named Fontana, a youth sent from Venice to Istanbul to apprentice as a dragoman. According to the letter, Fontana's injuries were performed 'not only against our

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<sup>15</sup> Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries many non-Muslims in fact embraced Ottoman Islam in circumstances quite different from those of either the *devşirme* or of Mediterranean corsairing. Women in particular became Muslim in situations which are slowly becoming clearer thanks to recent scholarship. See Krstić, *Narrating Conversions*; Baer M.D., "Islamic Conversion Narratives of Women: Social Change and Gendered Religious Hierarchy in Early Modern Ottoman Istanbul", *Gender & History* 16, 2 (2004) 425–458; Dursteler E., *Renegade Women: Gender, Identity, and Boundaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore: 2011).

Republic, but against our holiest Religion, with threats to the Church of St. Francis'.<sup>16</sup> Fontana's disloyalty is cast first and foremost in political terms (treason), and only secondarily, and hence requiring more elaboration, in religious terms, i.e. threats ostensibly made to a church in Galata. This case was hardly exceptional. In commenting on individual converts to Islam in their weekly dispatches, Venetian diplomats in Istanbul often implied that such "renegades" were motivated by economic and social exigencies – debt, financial woes, frustration with limited prospects of social mobility, or personal envy.<sup>17</sup> The political damage they caused to the Venetian state, while a source of grave concern, was deemed inevitable.

This conception of renegades as motivated by this-worldly, contingent interests thus situated the process of becoming Muslim within a larger Ottoman project of imperial subject-making. In the case of both *devşirme* recruits and adult converts, it implied that changing political affiliation was imposed by outside forces, rather than accepted, let alone initiated by intending, purposive subjects.<sup>18</sup> As I show below, through mechanisms yet to be fully explored, this understanding came to color Venetian expectations about Muslim conversion to Catholicism as well. Such expectations obviated prolonged catechization, and even the need to ascertain a Muslim catechumen's wishes prior to baptism, in contrast to both Post-Tridentine dogma and practice when it came to Protestant and Jewish baptismal candidates.

### *Peregrinations in Spacetime*

One of the central early modern institutions that prompted people to narrate the circumstances of their religious conversion to and from

<sup>16</sup> ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, Reg. 19, fols. 23r–v (May 26, 1629).

<sup>17</sup> Dursteler E., *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore: 2006): 112–129.

<sup>18</sup> The notion that intentionality was a precondition for naturalization was longstanding in Venetian political thought, dating back to the medieval Italian jurists Accursius (c. 1182–1263) and Baldus de Ubaldis (1327–1400). See Riesenberg P.N., *Citizenship in the Western Tradition: Plato to Rousseau* (Chapel Hill: 1992) 131; Kirshner J., "Between Nature and Culture: An Opinion of Baldus of Perugia on Venetian Citizenship as Second Nature", *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 9, 2 (1979) 179–208.

Catholicism was the Holy Office.<sup>19</sup> Whether through voluntary confessions or induced inquisitorial interrogations, deponents in front of the Inquisition had to explain or deny their alleged transition from one religious community to another. In some cases, they narrated their becoming Catholics; in others, their apostasy; in yet others, their oscillating between the two. In all cases, however, deponents were faced with the need to fit their narratives into inquisitorial frames of reference, to make their narratives compelling and, vitally, to prove their current sincerity and orthodoxy as good Catholics.<sup>20</sup> How did deponents achieve this? How did people of widely varied backgrounds negotiate the constraints of the inquisitorial genre, itself localized and subject to political vagaries?<sup>21</sup> How did they plot narratives deemed plausible and convincing to inquisitors' ears?

We may seek a partial answer from scholarship on religious conversion in the societies where many deponents hailed from. As Tijana Krstić cogently argues, in the early modern Ottoman Empire, the process of becoming Muslim often did not originate in deep spiritual transformation, but in the acceptance of new ritual practices. Spiritual transformation may or may not have followed at a later stage, through participation in communal activities.<sup>22</sup> Such a conception of religious conversion contrasts with the Protestant Reformation's emphasis on interiority, authenticity, and the subject's quest to find meaning in an unmediated relationship with God.<sup>23</sup> Yet, lest we essentialize a

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<sup>19</sup> Established in 1547, the Holy Office of Venice was a highly autonomous chapter of the Roman Inquisition, administered by clerics who for the most part came from Venice's patrician ruling class. For an overview see the bibliography in Ruggiero G., "The Strange Death of Margarita Marcellini: Male, Signs, and the Everyday World of Pre-Modern Medicine", *American Historical Review* 106, 4 (2001) 1141–1158, n3.

<sup>20</sup> On the construction of plausible narratives within constraints imposed by genre and institutional setting, see Davis N.Z., *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: 1987); for an illuminating discussion of some specifically Venetian institutional genres and the life narratives they produced, see Ferraro J.M., *Marriage Wars in Late Renaissance Venice* (New York: 2001).

<sup>21</sup> On the differences between the Venetian inquisition and its Roman counterpart, see Monter E.W. – Tedeschi J., "Toward a Statistical Profile of the Italian Inquisitions, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries", In Henningsen G. – Tedeschi J. – Amiel C. (eds.), *The Inquisition in Early Modern Europe: Studies on Sources and Methods* (Dekalb, Ill: 1986) 130–157. See also Prosperi A., "'Otras Indias': Missionari della Contrariforma fra contadini e selvaggi", in Id. *Scienze, credenze occulte, livelli di cultura* (Florence: 1982) 205–234 for a discussion of how inquisitors' perceptions of peasants on Europe's periphery were shaped by missionary reports from the Indies.

<sup>22</sup> Krstić, *Narrating Conversions* 120–122.

<sup>23</sup> On Protestant conceptions of conversion, see Keane W., "From Fetishism to Sincerity: Agency, the Speaking Subject, and their Historicity in the Context of Religious

timeless prototype of Protestant conversion, it is helpful to heed the warnings of another historian, Keith Luria, who has studied Protestant-Catholic conversion in early modern France. According to Luria, it was precisely the seeming self-interest of converts and their frequent oscillation between confessions that prompted both Catholic and Protestant clergy in the seventeenth century to develop 'a model of conversion that stressed the importance of conscience and deep interior motivation, as well as true doctrine and the role of intellect and emotion in adhering to it'.<sup>24</sup> Thus, while for Muslim subjects of Christian origin who sought reconciliation with the Church the most readily available line of argument was one of contingency, for Protestants converting to Catholicism, the stated motivation had to be interior and 'pure'. If Ottoman subjects could benefit from arguing implicitly for a distinction between their intentions and actions, it was precisely such a distinction that was increasingly problematized and suspected for confessants of Protestant background.

To elucidate this difference, we may employ Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope which he defines as 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature'.<sup>25</sup> The differing chronotopic qualities of Ottoman-Muslim and Protestant inquisitorial depositions help to illuminate their underlying assumptions about the nature of the person undergoing conversion and, consequently, the nature of conversion itself. Building on Krstić's and Luria's insights, I identify two prototypical chronotopes of conversion in these inquisitorial depositions. One, the 'chronotope of conjuncture', is especially prevalent in the depositions of Ottoman Muslim subjects who asserted their Christian background or parentage. This chronotope depicts the transition from one confession to another as the contingent outcome of deponents' entry into a spatially-defined religious community at a particular historical moment.

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Conversion", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39, 4 (1997) 674–693; Idem "Sincerity, 'Modernity', and the Protestants", *Cultural Anthropology* 17, 1 (2002) 65–92.

<sup>24</sup> Luria K.P., "The Politics of Protestant Conversion to Catholicism in Seventeenth-Century France", in Veer, P. van der (ed.), *Conversion to Modernities: The Globalization of Christianity* (New York: 1996) 28.

<sup>25</sup> Bakhtin M.M., *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: 1981) 84. Put differently, it is 'a unit of analysis for studying texts according to the ratio and nature of the temporal and spatial categories represented': See Emerson C. – Holquist M., "Glossary", in Bakhtin M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: 1981) 425. Use of the concept avoids privileging either time or space, but rather emphasizes their interdependence and inseparability.

The other, the 'chronotope of purposive journeying', is especially prevalent in Protestant depositions. It describes deponents' journeys from non-Catholic to Catholic space as prompted by a prior, inner spiritual transformation. The journey is thus the result rather than the cause of conversion; it is a journey purposefully undertaken by an already converted subject.

The chronotope of conjuncture is well illustrated in the deposition of Abdone q. Giovanni of Aleppo, who in 1616 confessed to the Venetian Holy Office his Christian birth, conversion to Islam, and desire to re-embrace Christianity through a formal process of 'reconciliation' with the Church.<sup>26</sup> In narrating his past, Abdone linked space, time and ritual practice, suggesting that it was his movement in space, dictated by historical exigencies and life stages (pilgrimage, revolt, economic crisis, war), which led him to identify himself at times as a Christian and at others as a Muslim:

I was born a Christian in Aleppo, and baptized. After about 10 years I was made Muslim, and for that time I lived as a Muslim, and was circumcised. And now having arrived in Venice, and wishing to leave said sect of Muslims and to be a good Catholic I am in this place to do what I will be ordered to do.

Asked on what occasion he had left the Catholic faith and became Muslim.

He responded: I traveled from youth, and at a certain time when in Sidon in the territory of Tripoli some Muslims rebelled, I joined them [*lit.* went among them] and donned a turban on my head, and they accepted me and asked me who I was, and I told them that I was Muslim. And I told them that from a young age I had been away from my home, and that's why I wasn't circumcised, and so then they made me circumcise. But I [only] told them that because if I had told them I were Christian, they would have made me renege by force or they would have killed me, and that's why I told them I was Muslim. And then I also let

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<sup>26</sup> Such reconciliation processes were authorized and supervised by the Holy Office, hence the need for a deposition. It should be noted that Venetian reconciliation procedures rarely involved more than some penitential exercises and/or religious instruction in the *House of Catechumens* (see note 36 below), and thus differed significantly from their Iberian counterpart, where the reconciliation of *conversos* often also entailed a public abjuration of heresy and a potentially harsh inquisitorial sentence. On Iberian reconciliation procedures, see Graizbord D.L., *Souls in Dispute: 'Converso' Identities in Iberia and the Jewish Diaspora, 1580–1700* (Philadelphia: 2004) 105 and *passim*. On the Italian procedure, see Scaraffia L., *Rinnegati. Per una storia dell'identità occidentale* (Rome: 2002) 101ff.



them circumcise me for the same fear, so that they accept the fact that I wasn't circumcised.

Asked why he went like that to Sidon among Muslims, and not among Christians.

He responded: I was in Jerusalem to visit the Holy Sepulcher as a pilgrim, and on the way back I passed through Sidon and not knowing where to go, I joined them, because there was also a great need.

[...]

When they circumcised me and made me a Muslim they called me Ebraim. And I served as a soldier for a year under a captain who was called Magiar Mustaffa who was the head of the rebels. And after the year had passed I went to Cairo, and since no one knew that I had been a Muslim, I dressed as a Christian and stayed among Christians for seven years. After that I went in the direction of Constantinople, but in Bursa there was a Muslim who recognized me and knew I had been a Muslim, and in order that he does not uncover me, I ran away to the Hungarian border to come in these ways to Christendom, but a barber told me that the roads were not safe, and that I would be captured as a spy, and so out of fear I came back and by other ways I then arrived in Sarajevo. And from there with some Muslim merchants I arrived in Venice, and while I was with them I acted as a Muslim, because they considered me to be a Muslim, and believed that I was one of those holy men [santoni] who go begging.

Asked, he responded: I didn't return to Aleppo because it was known there that I had become a Muslim, and it would not have been safe for long, although I was there for two months one time on my way, and went to Church like a Christian.<sup>27</sup>

In his deposition, Abdone presents an expedient understanding of religious adherence, premised on practice rather than belief. When being Christian was inconvenient, he identified as a Muslim; when it became convenient again, he re-embraced Christianity.<sup>28</sup> By his own admission, he had switched his allegiance at least five times, always due to contingent and pragmatic considerations. Abdone further invokes a

<sup>27</sup> ASVe, Santo Uffizio, Processi, box 71, file 'Abdone q. Giovanni Sensale d'Aleppo' (April 14, 1616). This and all subsequent translations of archival documents are mine, unless otherwise noted. See appendix 1 for an excerpted transcript of the original text.

<sup>28</sup> The gloss 'Muslim' for Abdone's self-reported conversion is somewhat misleading here: Abdone described himself as having turned 'Turk' ('turco'). As I noted above, early modern Italian speakers rarely distinguished between 'Turk' and 'Muslim', and glossed both (as well as Ottoman and, less frequently, any Ottoman subject of any ethno-religious affiliation) as 'Turco'. The complex of religious, juridical, and emotional identifications implied by 'having turned Turk' is hard to disentangle in the absence of any other documents produced by or about this deponent.

popular trope of conversion to Islam at sword's edge, which dated back to the Crusades, and which morphed into an image of the Ottomans as barbarous people who violently converted their Christian slaves.<sup>29</sup> Yet, although he presents his conversion to Islam as coerced, Abdone himself seems to have sensed the inadequacy of such a line of argument in front of the inquisition. To strengthen his case, he attempted to show a conscious plan to pursue a Christian life by prefacing his narrative with an explicit declaration of his wish 'to leave said sect of Muslims and to be a good Catholic', and by framing his voyage to Venice as a purposive, active quest to re-enter Christendom, presaged by his failed plan to reach Hungary, and his boyhood pilgrimage to Jerusalem. And yet, unlike many contemporary Protestant narratives of conversion, his is defined overall by exigency and serendipity rather than by purposive action.

Abdone was hardly unique in linking his shifting confessional affiliation to a set of ritual moments rooted in membership in particular communities and locales. For him, as for many other deponents in front of the Venetian inquisition, conversion entailed a journey from one geographical point to another, that is, from non-Christian to Christian space. The road offers the opportunity for both religious indeterminacy and smooth(er) transition from one confession to another. Moreover, journeys in space are linked to specific periods of time, and are segmented by rituals such as baptism, pilgrimage, and confession or, alternatively, circumcision and the donning of the turban.

Abdone's effort to link conversion to specific chronotopic moments should be understood within the constraints of the genre of reconciliation narratives. It also speaks to the difference between the narratives of Ottoman deponents, on the one hand, and of Protestant ones, on the other. Our ability to compare these two groups is facilitated by two dozen reconciliation narratives preserved in three files in the archives of the Venetian Holy Office, dating, respectively, from 1616, 1630–1632, and 1647.<sup>30</sup> The first and last files contain a total of seven depositions by Ottoman subjects, who all claimed to have been born

<sup>29</sup> Repeated conversions back and forth between Christianity and Islam have been documented in the Frankish kingdom of Jerusalem, as well as in Mamluk and Ottoman territories. See Kedar B.Z., "Multidirectional Conversion in the Frankish Levant", in Muldoon J. (ed.), *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages* (Gainesville: 1997) 191–199.

<sup>30</sup> ASVe, Santo Uffizio, Processi, boxes 71, 88, 103.

Christians and to wish to re-embrace Christianity after having lived as Muslims for years, sometimes decades. The middle file, dating from 1630–1632, contains thirteen depositions, three by Ottoman subjects of similar circumstances to the ones just described, and ten by German- and French-speaking subjects who were raised as Lutherans or Calvinists, and who wished to become Catholic. Of these twenty depositions, five are by women (four Muslim and one Protestant) and fifteen are by men (six Muslim, nine Protestant). Most depositions were mediated (linguistically and, most probably, also theologically) by clergymen: the Prior of the House of Catechumens in the case of Ottoman deponents, the preacher-confessor of the German ‘nation’ in the *Fondaco dei Tedeschi* (the German Exchange House) and other Venetian clergymen in the case of Protestants.

Two striking differences stand out between the depositions of Muslim-Ottoman and of Protestant deponents. First, most Ottoman deponents emphasized family circumstances and spatial mobility as key to their shifting religious affiliation, and rarely dwelled on personal motivations for such shifts. According to Ottoman deponents, they were Christian while living in a Christian household/community, and became Muslim once they moved into a Muslim one. Deponents often accounted for such transition by referring to a parent’s death or conversion to Islam, enslavement, marriage to a Muslim, or migration in search of economic betterment. In these accounts, as in Abdone’s, conversion follows movement in space and change in personal status. Conversely, Protestant deponents, while acknowledging their birth into Reformed families as the source of their heretical upbringing and former beliefs, consistently highlight their individual choice to become Catholics, often linking this temporally-defined act of choice to key transformative moments – a dream, a vision, a vow taken during severe illness, a chance encounter with a Catholic preacher – which led to a spiritual awakening. In their accounts, the formal, outward assumption of a Catholic identity *followed* inner persuasion, and was *followed by* a journey in space from Protestant to Catholic territory. Spatial mobility, in other words, was the outcome, rather than the cause, of their inner religious transformation, which takes center stage.<sup>31</sup> Protestant depositions are also more detailed than those

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<sup>31</sup> On the geographical mobility of Lutheran converts to Catholicism in the early modern Holy Roman Empire, see Corpis D.J., *The Geography of Religious Conversion: Crossing the Boundaries of Belief in Southern Germany, 1648–1800* (Unpublished

of Ottoman subjects with regards to articles of faith, highlighting both deponents' past errors and current belief in Catholic truths. Theological issues are almost entirely absent from the depositions of Ottoman subjects.

To illustrate these differences, let us compare two depositions. One was produced by a Calvinist, Pierre Blanche, in 1631; the other, by the Muslim Maddalena *olim* Rachima in 1647. Here is the deposition of eighteen-year-old surgeon Pierre Blanche ('Pietro Blanco'), native of Lyon, the son of a Calvinist father and a Catholic mother:

[...] I have followed the life of my father, nourished and raised in the sect and heresies of Calvin [...] and having left my country last year in the month of October I stayed in Piedmont for several months, practicing medicine according to my profession and finally five months ago I came to Venice, and stayed in the old Lazaretto for about three months, and then in Venice, and after I left France, I have always thought of leaving that heretical sect of Calvin, and becoming Catholic because in France I saw some miracles and even more elsewhere in Italy, performed by the Blessed Virgin. Therefore I resolved with determination to become Catholic, and actually made a vow to go to Rome, and I went to Genoa to be quarantined and in the past days I went to [the church of] S. Francesco di Paola to the Father Confessor who is present here [...] because knowing to have been in a most grave error having held, observed, and believed all that which the Calvinist sect holds, sees, and observes, and recognizing the Catholic and Apostolic Roman Catholic faith to be true I ask now this most holy tribunal to be reconciled with the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Roman Catholic Church.<sup>32</sup>

In contrast to Pierre, here is Maddalena's deposition:

I was born in the countryside of the city of Clini [Koljane], three days from Šibenik [now in Croatia], to Christian father and mother. My father was called Melin, he was a peasant and a soldier, my mother was called Chiarana; both died. I don't know the name they gave me when I was baptized, and my sister Maddalena, who may be alive or dead, told me I had been baptized. And I lived with my father until I was about ten. [Scribe's note:] Correcting herself, she said: I had lived with my father

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dissertation, New York University, New York: 2001) 112ff. On the journeys of early modern Jewish converts in the Holy Roman Empire and in England, respectively: Carlebach E., *Divided Souls* 112, 120; Dureau Y., "The Role of Converts in Cultural Exchanges in Europe in the 16th and 17th Century", in Meyers C. – Simms, N.T., *Troubled Souls: Conversos, Crypto-Jews, and Other Confused Jewish Intellectuals From the Fourteenth Through the Eighteenth Century* (Hamilton: 2001) 34.

<sup>32</sup> ASVe, Santo Uffizio, Processi, box 88 (Oct. 16, 1631). See appendix 2 for a transcript of the original deposition.

until I was five, when I was taken by Turkish relatives of my father's, who took me to Zemonico [Zemunik Donji, in Croatia], where I was raised and was given the name Rachima, and they made me live according to Turkish [Muslim] law, and married me to a Turk called Fasula, who may be alive or dead, but we did not have any children. I am about 50 years old and all this time I have lived as a Turk, and conformed to the Mohammedan rites. Now having arrived in this Catholic City and having been instructed for about 40 days in the House of Catechumens in the articles of the Catholic holy faith I see that Our Lord Jesus Christ is God, born of the Virgin Mary, that there are three divine persons, that the Church has seven sages.<sup>33</sup> And I hold and believe universally all that the Holy Mother Church holds and believes. And therefore I am ready to abjure, and live and die in this holy Christian faith.<sup>34</sup>

Whereas Maddalena-Rachima dwells on her childhood vagaries and the circumstances that turned her into a Muslim, Pierre sums up his childhood in one sentence. And while for Maddalena her life story is one of changing family attachments over which she has no control (and narrated, accordingly, mostly in the passive voice) Pierre narrates his life as one of active, solitary traveling and career development. His spatial journeys – his departure from heretical France and entry into Catholic space via the territories of Piedmont and Genoa – are pre-saged (and presumably prompted) by the experience of miracles in his native country, and are closely interlinked with his spiritual journeys. Pierre emphasizes this religious transformation by defining his former beliefs as 'sectarian' and 'heretical' right from the start.<sup>35</sup> Conversely, Maddalena describes the forty-odd years she had lived as a Muslim in a factual manner, suggesting no contrition or spiritual transformation until the very last sentence. She presents her current embrace of Christianity as the result of learning – the forty days of catechetical instruction she had received in the House of the Catechumens.<sup>36</sup> Yet

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<sup>33</sup> This reference could not be confirmed with certainty, but it is likely an oblique reference to the widely-circulating Book of the Seven Sages of Rome, popular around the Mediterranean basin from the late middle ages on, according to which people were encouraged to turn to the seven sages to profess their faith. I thank Father Juan Flores for his assistance on this issue.

<sup>34</sup> Santo Uffizio, Processi, box 103, file *Madalena q. Melin Turca* (June 4, 1647). See appendix 3 for a transcript of the original deposition.

<sup>35</sup> On the concept of "spiritual journey" as a hallmark of early modern Venetian evangelism, see Martin J., "Spiritual Journeys and the Fashioning of Religious Identity in Renaissance Venice", *Renaissance Studies* 10, 3 (1996) 358–370.

<sup>36</sup> On this institution, see Rothman E.N., "Becoming Venetian: Conversion and Transformation in the Seventeenth-Century Mediterranean", *Mediterranean Historical Review* 21, 1 (2006) 39–75.

she does not claim any intentions to return to Christianity prior to her arrival in Venice, which she casts as happenstance, not as a purposive journey. Furthermore, she does not attest to any deep spiritual transformation in the wake of her travels. Whereas Pierre's narrative implies that he had waited all his life to become Catholic and to arrive in Catholic lands, Maddalena's narrative does not dwell on intentions. Here, religion is determined by kinship networks. She had been a Christian when raised by her Christian parents, but became a Muslim once her Muslim relatives took her to Zemunik and married her off to a Muslim man. Now that she is in a Catholic land, her return to Christianity follows. For Pierre, intentions are the driving force of his life-story. He is a willing individual, who shakes off the shackles of heretical kin to follow his own desires, namely to reach Rome, and embrace Catholicism. He actively pursues this goal, first by embarking on a journey, then by seeking out a Catholic clergyman to assist him. If Maddalena's arrival in the House of the Catechumens is left unaccounted for in her narrative, Pierre presents his encounter with the confessor at the church of San Francesco di Paola as the direct result of his endeavors, and his alone.

What might account for these stark differences between Maddalena's and Pierre's narratives? One may look for an explanation in gendered notions of the self and its transformative capacity. Certainly, even these brief narratives underscore the important role that gender played in shaping conceptions of the self for these two deponents. To be clear, this does not mean that kinship alliances determined women's conversion more than men's, nor that spatial mobility characterized men more than women. Nor should we read conversion narratives as unmediated reflections of the protagonists' predicament.<sup>37</sup> Rather, at work here are highly gendered narrative frames. The propensity of women converts from Christianity to Islam to justify their apostasy in front of the Holy Office as resulting from their master's or husband's wishes has been attested to in other contexts too.<sup>38</sup> Women converts often suggested that the continuity of their social role as caregivers

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<sup>37</sup> One historian, Anna Vanzan, has gone so far as to conclude that Muslim women converts' narratives reflected their 'passivity and resignation': Vanzan A., "In Search of Another Identity: Female Muslim-Christian Conversions in the Mediterranean World", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7, 3 (1996) 332.

<sup>38</sup> Bennassar B., "Conversions, esclavage et commerce des femmes dans les péninsules ibérique, italienne ou balkanique aux XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles", *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica* 2 (1996) 106.

(wives, mothers, concubines, or domestic slaves) justified the discontinuity of their religious affiliation, or, perhaps, that such discontinuity was not as total as their inquisitors imagined, since conversion helped them retain their overall social position. These tropes are clearly at work in Maddalena's narrative which, unlike Pierre's, emphasizes rootedness in family and place as what defines the protagonist's membership in a particular religious community. Men, on the other hand, rarely argued for continuity in social role as a justification for their conversion. Rather, they emphasized time and again the coercive and involuntary dimension of their conversion, the fact that they had no choice but to convert or become martyrs.

Along with widespread gendered representations of the converting self, converts' depositions were also shaped by specific intermediaries and institutions. Maddalena's narrative, like most other reconciliation depositions, is delivered to us through the mediation not only of a specific genre – the inquisitorial dialogue, of which the reconciliation deposition was a highly structured component – and specific (if sometimes anonymous) judges and scribes, but also of a particular clergyman, named in the preambles to several of the depositions: Girolamo Pastriccio, the Prior of the House of Catechumens.<sup>39</sup> While the extant record casts Pastriccio's mediation as strictly linguistic, stemming from deponents' ignorance of Italian, it was also, per force, theological and cultural as well. Pastriccio's considerable role in shaping reconciliation narratives is further suggested by the strikingly similar structure and contents of several other depositions in which he was involved. Among them are the narratives of two other Ottoman Muslim women professing to have been born to Christian parents and seeking reconciliation with the Catholic Church, the fifty-year-old Catterina Odorelavich, whose story was almost identical to Maddalena's, and Anastasia Viggénich, who arrived in Venice with her Muslim husband and two sons, all of whom converted to Christianity.<sup>40</sup> The three testimonies were recorded within a few days of each other. Of particular interest is Anastasia's deposition, which presents not only her early childhood adherence to Islam, but also her very recent re-embrace of

<sup>39</sup> Pastriccio was born in Split (modern Croatia), and became Prior of the House of Catechumens in 1645. Archivio storico del Patriarca di Venezia (henceforth: ASPV), Sezione Antica, Catecumeni, registri di battesimi (henceforth: Crb), reg. 2, fol. 19r (July 22, 1645).

<sup>40</sup> Both files are in: ASVe, Santo Uffizio, Processi, box 103 (June 4 & 7, 1647).

Christianity as determined by her kinfolk. Her first conversion was brought about by her father's decision to sell her to Muslims. Now, 'I find myself married to a Turk [Muslim] named Mustafâ, who came to Venice with [our] two sons to become Christian'.

Pastriccio's understanding of the genre of inquisitorial reconciliation and his theological outlook no doubt played a decisive role in the construction of these narratives. His mediation was essential not only during the depositions, but in deponents' prior socialization in the House of Catechumens, which lasted anywhere from days to months. As I discuss elsewhere, while in the House, catechumens were guided by Jesuit friars and Catholic clergy (who often possessed, like Pastriccio, had roots or rich past experience working on the Ottoman frontier) and Venetian patrician patrons.<sup>41</sup>

Deponents emphasized contingent ritual practice rather than deep spiritual conviction as defining their membership in a religious community. This emphasis was predicated not only on deponents' sojourn in the House of Catechumens, acquaintance with Pastriccio, or gendered experience of kinship and mobility.<sup>42</sup> Crucially, it was also shaped by their Ottoman provenance. Both Ottoman women's emphasis on kinship and Ottoman men's emphasis on fear of violence as the determinant factor in changing their religious allegiance share an important characteristic: they place the locus of agency outside the speaking subject. The twenty-one-year-old Giovanni Romolo from Thessalonica became Muslim when he was taken to Istanbul at age eleven, 'forced to renege, circumcised, and made to trample on the cross'. He subsequently lived as a Muslim for nine years until his arrival in Venice eight days prior to appearing in front of the Holy Office in 1630.<sup>43</sup> The eighteen-year-old Christoforo Sansona Sinope from Crete was recruited at age six to be a 'Zamora'<sup>44</sup> and 'was always a Muslim by

<sup>41</sup> Rothman, "Becoming Venetian".

<sup>42</sup> Among others, Marc Baer has addressed the gendered nature of conversion by examining the strategic use of conversion by women appearing before Sha'ria courts to dissolve their marriages in sixteenth-century Istanbul. Unfortunately, the article does not consider how our notions of agency, subjecthood, and conversion may be at odds with early modern Ottoman ones. Baer M.D., "Islamic Conversion Narratives of Women: Social Change and Gendered Religious Hierarchy in Early Modern Ottoman Istanbul", *Gender & History* 16, 2 (2004) 425-458.

<sup>43</sup> ASVe, Santo Uffizio, Processi, box 88 (Oct. 3, 1630).

<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the word refers to a player of the Dzamare flute, common in the southern Balkans.



force, and externally and [in] exterior life but in my heart I was always a Christian. And I was a Muslim only outwardly, because I couldn't do otherwise'.<sup>45</sup> These cases do not suggest that Ottoman deponents lacked a concept of intentionality. On the contrary, as I noted earlier, Abdone framed his narrative by an abiding wish to reach Christian territory. Similarly, Christoforo Sansona Sinope distinguished between 'exterior life', in which he practiced Islam, and his inner locus of perduring Christian belief. But unlike Protestants, Ottoman deponents did not ascribe to interiority and intentionality the same force to change the course of their lives, i.e., they did not account for their religious transformation by way of their will.

Indeed, the one deposition of a female Protestant preserved in the collection discussed above bears greater similarity to those of her male Protestant fellows, than to any deposition by a Muslim woman. According to Anna Fraiss, a twenty four year old swiss woman,

having been born, nourished, and raised by a father and a mother in the lands of Lutherans, I have always held and believed all that the sect of Luther teaches, except that I have believed that there is purgatory, and also in the intercession of saints. Finally I have come to recognize my errors through the preaching and exhortations of the above-mentioned Father Fra Giacomo [and] have resolved to bring myself to the bosom if the Holy Catholic Church, totally detesting everything that contradicts said Church, [and] I confirm to believe in the future and observe that which the Holy Mother Catholic Church holds, believes, and teaches. Therefore I humbly appeal to this holy tribunal wishing to reconcile myself with said holy mother Church.<sup>46</sup>

As in Pierre Blanche's narrative, and in striking contrast to those of Muslim women, Anna has scant little to say about her past kinship ties, other than to confirm her spiritual transformation and thus to redeem herself in part by suggesting her early skepticism about the basic Lutheran critiques of purgatory and intercession.

To conclude this section, a word of caution is in place against treating 'Ottoman' and 'Protestant' chronotopes of conversion as the

<sup>45</sup> 'Sempre son stato turco per forza, et quanto all'estrinsero et al vivere esteriorm[en]te ma nel mio core son sempre stato christiano. Et solam[en]te Turco di fuori, perche non poteva far di manco': ASVe, Santo Uffizio, Processi, box 71 (June 7, 1616). The surname Sinope may indicate family roots on the Black Sea coast.

<sup>46</sup> ASVe, Santo Uffizio, Processi, box 88, (June 4, 1630). See appendix 4 for a transcript of the original deposition.

products of internally-cohesive and self-contained cultures. Rather, they may be viewed as prototypes, which congealed in specific (in this case, Venetian) institutions and genres through the active mediation of identifiable social actors. As an illustration, let us examine a narrative produced by a Venetian nobleman, which articulates an intermediate chronotope of conversion. In his reconciliation deposition of 1632, twenty-seven-year-old Venetian patrician Marco Lombardo described how, six years earlier, he had been onboard a Venetian ship near Alexandria, Egypt, when captured by Muslims, and taken to a castle where

I stayed for four months and observed there the Mohammedan ceremonies, and had violence used against me by getting me drunk with brandy, and was violently circumcised and forced to speak Turkish, and I confessed to them to be Muslim for the fear of death with which they threatened me. But in my heart I had God, the Virgin, and the saints, which I always honored with my orations day and night. And I did not perform any other ceremonies, and that which I did, I did only with the exterior and never with the heart. Then when I saw an opportune time, I moved to Nazareth, and here I found a Franciscan friar who reconciled me [with the Church] in the manner that can be observed from the certificate he gave me, which I now present to the Holy Office. Now sorrowful and repentant I ask God for forgiveness and this holy tribunal to be reconciled to the holy faith, promising to live from now on as a good and true Catholic, and it is only a few days since I came back to Venice, that is about 5 days, and after I escaped from the Turks [Muslims] I have always lived in the Catholic manner and I confessed and communicated in Nazareth three times during the eight days I stayed there, and another time when I was in Zante.<sup>47</sup>

This dramatic narrative exploits the common tropes of Muslim barbarity and forced conversion at sword's edge to appeal to the inquisitors' mercy and to exculpate the speaker from charges of apostasy. Unlike most Ottoman subjects who sought reconciliation with the Catholic Church, Marco identifies himself as an agentive, intending subject. After narrating an initial episode of captivity and forced conversion where he is a passive victim ('had violence used against me', 'was violently circumcised and forced to speak Turkish'), the remainder of his deposition narrates his own purposive actions ('I saw an opportune time, I moved to Nazareth, and here I found a Franciscan friar', 'I ask

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<sup>47</sup> ASVe, Santo Uffizio, Processi, box 88 (Nov. 8, 1632). See appendix 5 for a transcript of the original deposition.

God for forgiveness', 'I confessed and communicated'). Yet, like most other deponents in front of the Venetian Holy Office discussing their conversion to Islam, Marco says little about matters of belief, and presents the locus of religious affiliation in ritual practices (e.g. circumcision and 'speaking Turkish'; in other narratives: trampling on the cross, or eating meat indiscriminately on Friday and holiday), rather than in theological or spiritual transformation. This calls for further examination of other narrative genres, both Venetian and Ottoman, which were available to deponents and their spiritual counselors, and which no doubt shaped their accounts.

To qualify my argument, in a few other cases, personal will is referred to *a posteriori*, to justify Muslims' conversion to Christianity – particularly that of women and girls – against the wishes of their kinfolk. For example, in 1586 the Venetian authorities had to decide on the case of a daughter of an Ottoman *çavuş* (messenger), who had been wedded to a renegade from Puglia, in southern Italy. After the two had arrived in Budua (Montenegro) in early 1586, perhaps because of her husband's attempt to return to Christianity, the young woman, now named Dorotea, was transferred to a Venetian charitable institution, the *Casa delle Convertite*, where, upon interrogation, she declared – in Turkish writing – her wish to be Christian.<sup>48</sup> In another case, in 1627, an Ottoman Bosnian military governor who suspected that his daughter had been kidnapped and forcibly converted six years earlier, was taken on a well-orchestrated tour of the premises of the *Casa delle Zitelle*, another Venetian institution for girls, where his daughter insisted she was free and 'did not wish to leave Heaven for the earth', nor 'depart from the salvation of the soul [...]'.<sup>49</sup> In 1642, a Bosnian woman named Lucia, who had escaped her husband and relatives several months earlier and was now tracked down in Venice by her brother, stated that she had been 'carried to a ship against her will' and that 'her wish was to stay in Venice as a Christian, since she feared

<sup>48</sup> ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, Reg. 7, fols. 32r–33r, 40v, 46r (March 14, 1586).

<sup>49</sup> ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli, Reg. 18, fols. 40r–v (June 5, 1627). For a fuller analysis of this case, see: Rothman "Conversion and Convergence in the Venetian-Ottoman Borderlands", *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 41, 3 (2011) 601–634.

being killed by her own parents if she returned to her homeland'.<sup>50</sup> Yet all these professions of intentionality, will, and, indeed, individual agency were made after the fact, by 'model converts' who were already well-versed in Venetian genres of narrating conversion. They cannot be taken as indicative of the nature of the interactions that led up to baptism.

*Fixing itineraries, ascertaining intentions*

Another genre in which the competing chronotopes of conjuncture and purposive journeying can be traced is the *examina matrimoniorum* (matrimonial examination). In an effort to eliminate irregular forms of cohabitation, concubinage, secret marriages, and other matrimonies concluded without a priest officiating, the Council of Trent decreed that, if an intended bride or groom had lived away from their place of origin for a substantial period after puberty, their celibate status had to be verified prior to marriage.<sup>51</sup> The process of verification took different forms, and applied to different categories of persons in different Catholic societies.<sup>52</sup> In seventeenth-century Venice, all Christians who sought a marriage license and whose baptismal records were unavailable, namely foreign-born Christians, as well as converts from Judaism and Islam, had to produce two witnesses who had known them their entire adult life.<sup>53</sup> These witness testimonies, now preserved

<sup>50</sup> 'portata in vassello contro sua voglia [...] esser sua volontà di star a Ven[ezi]a christiana dubitando di esser morta da proprij parenti se ritornasse alla sua Patria': ASVe, Avogadori di Comun, Misc. Penale, box 343, file 15, fol. 3v (Aug. 7, 1642).

<sup>51</sup> Franco I., "L'emigrazione da Premana (Como) e da Grosio (Sondrio) a Venezia nel periodo 1800–1850 indagata attraverso gli *Examina Matrimoniorum*", *Annali di San Michele. Special issue: Le Alpi, il Trentino e il lavoro dell'uomo* 8 (1995) 86.

<sup>52</sup> For example, in one of few studies of *examina matrimoniorum* to date, Luis Martínez-Fernandez has shown that in nineteenth-century Puerto Rico, 'certificates of *soltería* (bachelorhood or spinsterhood) were required of foreigners, so-called *vagos*, people without a fixed domicile, widows and widowers, and all those who had absented themselves from their parishes for more than a year'. Martínez-Fernandez L., "Marriage, Protestantism, and Religious Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico", *The Journal of Religious History* 24, 3 (2000) 267.

<sup>53</sup> To be sure, the vast majority of petitioners for marriage license who were subjected to this procedure were not converts, but rather foreign born Christians, mostly journeymen and servants from the *Terraferma* (Venice's colonies on the Italian mainland) and from Transalpine Europe, and, much less frequently, merchants and mariners from the *Stato da Mar*, Venice's Adriatic and Mediterranean colonies. Of the dozen or so converts who were subjected to this process before 1670, all but one

in the archives of the Venetian Patriarchal curia, attest to the social networks that foreigners forged within and outside the city, and which were mobilized to weave plausible biographical narratives.<sup>54</sup> In particular, the testimonies suggest how foreigners and locals understood intimacy, locality, and embeddedness in specific social roles.

Of course, one should not read these testimonies as reliable sketches of actual life trajectories. As will become clearer below, testimonies rarely contradicted each other openly, and the remarkable level of detail that witnesses were ready to provide about neighbors' and mere acquaintances' lives suggests careful prior briefing. In order to be granted a marriage license, applicants had to recruit witnesses who could claim familiarity with their whereabouts not only in Venice but, if possible, throughout their adult lives. This was highly unlikely in the case of Muslim converts and other Christian subjects of Ottoman background, who often had traveled a fair amount or who had experienced uprooting due to war. Such persons had to either forge life histories which omitted inconvenient sojourns outside Venice, or summon witnesses of similar background who could claim to have known them for their entire adult life.

Like reconciliation depositions, testimonies on behalf of converts often linked their spatio-temporal movement with key ritual moments and religious transformation. The striking differences between the testimonies on behalf of three Jewish and Muslim women converts, discussed below, may allow us to pose an initial hypothesis about the chronotopic features of such narratives. All three cases are premised on the interlacing of spatiotemporal movement with women's changes of status, both religious and familial. But whereas conversion enabled, if it did not determine, the Jewish convert's transformations of status and geographical journeys thereafter, the conversion of the two Muslim women followed their transformation of status and geographical journeys, and was implicitly presented as their effect.

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were former Muslims (the single Jewish case is discussed below). Men and women were more or less equally represented, but their typical witnesses and the resulting narratives differed markedly: whereas women's witnesses were mostly neighbors and masters, men's were as often work associates.

<sup>54</sup> The corpus of *examinum matrimoniorum* for the period 1592–1807 is collated in 338 volumes hundreds of pages each. For the period up to 1670, roughly 80 volumes of these examinations survive, including contemporary indices and summaries. To the best of my knowledge, this corpus has not yet been subjected to any systematic studies. The index to the series is available at: <http://tinyurl.com/457vwv2>.

Felice, daughter of Benetto and Dolcetta Cesana, was born in the Venetian ghetto, and was baptized in 1651, at age 13.<sup>55</sup> In 1667, at age 29, she approached the Venetian Patriarch for permission to marry. Felice's two witnesses were long-time immigrants to Venice: a fifty-year-old gondolier named Alvise, son of Daniele de Blanchis of Pinzano in Aquilea, who had lived in Venice for thirty years, and the sixty-year-old Maddalena, daughter of Giovanni Facini of Feltre, who had lived in Venice for thirty-seven years.<sup>56</sup> According to their testimonies, both witnesses had come to know Felice as neighbors shortly after her baptism, but kept in touch with her for sixteen-year thereafter, despite her several changes of residence.

The most striking aspect of Alvise's and Maddalena's testimonies on Felice's behalf is their contrived nature. Both witnesses provided the exact same chronology and geography for Felice's whereabouts over a sixteen-year period, including a sojourn in Ferrara fifteen years earlier, and a list of all the Venetian parishes where Felice had lived since leaving the Ghetto at age 13. It is unlikely that the two would have been able to date Felice's move to Ferrara (1652), and state its exact length (10 months) unless briefed by her. Yet, despite their fabricated nature, and potential suspicions about her celibacy and eligibility for marriage, that her ten-month sojourn with Francesco Colombo in Ferrara might have raised the testimonies went unchallenged, and Felice's request to marry was granted.<sup>57</sup>

Felice's witnesses have little to say about her conversion, and make no explicit links between that event and her mobility thereafter. Her conversion is clearly delimited in time (a past event which took place at the moment of transition from childhood to adulthood) and place

<sup>55</sup> Felice's baptismal record does not survive in the registers of converts' baptisms in either the Pia Casa dei Catecumeni or the Patriarchal Curia.

<sup>56</sup> It is noteworthy that Felice did not summon any Venetian natives as witnesses. Perhaps she did not know any well enough, or perhaps she considered her witnesses localized enough to produce convincing testimonies on her behalf.

<sup>57</sup> This was not always the case: Three years after Felice, Pier'Antonio q. Bechir, a Muslim convert from the Sibenik area, had to summon no less than ten witnesses (including two who submitted their testimonies in writing) before the Venetian Patriarch granted him permission to marry. Perhaps the fact that his baptism had taken place far away, in the town of Bisceglie in Spanish-occupied Puglia, and his lengthy sojourns away from Venice as a mariner, warranted greater scrutiny. For Felice's case, see ASPV, *Examinum Matrimoniorum*, reg. 81, fols. 1574r-v (Aug. 27, 1667). For Pier'Antonio's: ASPV, *Examinum Matrimoniorum*, reg. 68, fols. 375r-379r (Aug. 20, 1670).

(the convert left the ghetto and entered Catholic Venetian space). It is presented as independent of Felice's later peregrinations.

In sharp contrast, another matrimonial examination, that of Maria, a widowed convert of Muslim background from the Aegean Island of Skyros, articulates a chronotope of conjuncture much akin to that characteristic of Ottoman women's reconciliation depositions to the inquisition discussed above. Indeed, all of Maria's witnesses make explicit the connection between her shifting kinship and household position, geographical and social mobility, and religious affiliation.

According to Maria's three witnesses, she was captured as a youth by the Venetians on the island of Skyros in 1652, was brought to Crete by her captor, the operation's commander Count Sabeni, who promptly had her baptized, placed in a monastery, and then married off to one of his lieutenant captains, a German Lutheran ensign named Stefan, who died a few months later. When Sabeni decided to move to Venice he took Maria along, possibly at her request, and put her to work as a maidservant in his and in other, patrician households. However, when her plans to return to her *patria* were uncovered two years later, in December 1654, Maria was sent to the *Casa del Soccorso*, where she remained for a year and a half, until in May 1656 she was allowed to resume employment as a maidservant in the house of the Venetian Girolamo Avogadro. Now, in 1659, a possible matrimony prompted her to approach the Patriarch with her witnesses.<sup>58</sup>

The biography outlined above based on Maria's three witnesses systematically links her conversion to her social and geographical mobility. Not only was her baptism a direct consequence of her capture and transfer to the Venetian colony of Crete, but her marriage to a Christian (though 'heretical', i.e. Lutheran, as one of her witnesses obliquely remarked) was made possible by these moves. Her widowhood, which followed shortly after, occasioned another journey – this time to the metropole, and a new state of servility. If marrying an officer gained her freedom from formal slavery, becoming a widow forced her to go back under the direct patronage and patriarchal control, first of Count Sabeni, then of Girolamo Avogadro, and now, possibly, of a second husband. Indeed, as she was to discover once in Venice, her

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<sup>58</sup> ASPV, Sezione Antica, Examina Matrimoniorum, box 63, fols. 371r–372v (March 20, 1659). On the *Casa del Soccorso*, a Venetian female charitable institution, see Chojnacka M., *Working Women of Early Modern Venice* (Baltimore: 2001) 125 and passim.

desire to go back to Skyros would be the pretext for her removal from Avogadro's household and enclosure in a charitable institution. Only once her religious orthodoxy was confirmed (that is, once she was sufficiently dissuaded from leaving Christian Venice to re-embrace her Muslim past) was she removed from confinement. Now, perhaps at Sabeni's and Avogadro's behest, she was to be wedded again.

As I have argued elsewhere, the conflation of patronage, patriarchal authority, and religious discipline typified the relationships of female converts of Muslim background with their Venetian masters.<sup>59</sup> Such complex relationships could involve additional members of a master's household and an extended network of friends and kin. It is these complex ties of authority and patronage which may account for the occasional contradictions found in matrimonial examination records. For example, Maria's three witnesses diverged in important ways on the question of her relationship to Sabeni. Her first two witnesses, the thirty-seven-year-old ex-soldier Emanuel Machergiotti and the twenty-nine-year-old coppersmith Giacomo q. Raffaele Arneri, were both under sergeant major Sabeni's command in 1652, and remained his protégés after moving to Venice. Both claimed to have been present at Maria's first wedding, and plainly stated that Maria could not have re-married after her first husband's death 'because she has always stayed by the said Count'. These two testimonies apparently did not satisfy the Patriarch, for a month later another witness was summoned, the fifty-three-year-old Venetian native Girolamo Avogadro, who by his own account was an old acquaintance of Sabeni's, and who had employed Maria in his household 'for the past three or four years'. His testimony told a rather different story. At the urging of the Venetian authorities he took Maria into his home in 1654, shortly after she had been 'prompted by the chaplains of S. Zaccaria to turn to the Tribunals' against Sabeni. Avogadro was not interrogated as to the nature of Maria's allegations against her patron, and did not divulge any further details. But Sabeni's efforts to have Maria sent to the *Casa del Soccorso* only a few months later, under the pretext of her alleged desire to return to Skyros ('with evident danger of reneging the faith'), may suggest an effort to quell a potential scandal. Significantly, Avogadro's insistence at the closing of his testimony that it was Maria who had prompted Sabeni to take her to Venice with him – unconfirmed by the

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<sup>59</sup> See Rothman, "Becoming Venetian".



other witnesses – may have also served to emphasize Maria's agency in a chain of events over which she exercised very little control, and to assuage any concerns about her interests in the prospective marriage.

Maria's tangled relationship with Sabeni is only obliquely hinted at by the three witnesses (and, to be sure, was quite likely understood differently by each). Was she Sabeni's beloved, daughter-like protégé? Concubine? Sexual slave? In sending her first to a Cretan monastery, then to marry a German mercenary, then to Venice, then to Avogadro's household, then to the Casa del Soccorso, and finally to a new marriage, was Sabeni covering up, or trying to guarantee Maria's well-being? These questions are impossible to address given the Patriarchal tribunal's glaring lack of interest in them, and in the absence of any additional archival traces.

Similar ambiguities emerge from the matrimonial examinations of other converted women slaves of Ottoman background, raising similar questions about the interdependence of religious conversion, social and spatial mobility. Take, for example, the testimonies produced the same year, 1659, on behalf of Cattarina, purchased in 1649 as a child of ten or twelve by the Venetian Gabriele Gozzi from a merchant on Zante (Zakynthos). According to her two witnesses, thirty-seven-year-old Girolamo q. Aurelio Pruni and twenty-nine-year-old Domenico q. Bartolomeo Furello, both members of the Gozzi household, Cattarina had always been under Gozzi's 'protection'. Gozzi, they claimed, had kept Cattarina in his house in Venice under lock and key until shortly before his death, when he had her transferred to the *Casa del Soccorso* of Vicenza, from whence she was returned to Venice by Gabriele's father, Alberto, only a few weeks before the testimonies were produced.<sup>60</sup> Whether Cattarina was Gabriele's concubine or not (the witnesses claimed she had been a child of ten or twelve when captured in 1649, yet her baptismal certificate of 1654 defined her as 'of adult age'), some of the dates in the narrative raise questions. Why was Cattarina baptized in the small village of Bevadoro (now part of the city of Vicenza), rather than in Venice, in which case she

<sup>60</sup> ASPV, Sezione Antica, Examina Matrimoniorum, reg. 63, fols. 647v–648v (Oct. 29, 1659). Alberto Gozzi was a Venetian merchant with some Ottoman trading partners. He was the master of at least one other converted slave girl, thirteen-year-old Antonia Margarita, formerly Sala, who was baptized in the House of Catechumens on Oct. 13, 1655. See ASPV, Crb, reg. 2, fol. 45v. For Gozzi's commercial activities see ASVe, Cinque Savii, Risposte, box 154, fols. 26v–27v (June 6, 1646).

would have been eligible for support from the House of Catechumens, but also subjected – along with her master – to much closer scrutiny? And why was her baptism held only in 1654, approximately five years after her arrival in Venice? More interestingly, how was she admitted into the *Casa del Soccorso* prior to her baptism (the governors of the *Soccorso* claimed in 1659 she had lived there for seven years)? And what prompted Alberto Gozzi to retrieve Cattarina from Vicenza and seek a husband for her now?

Here again, the extant documentation does not allow us to answer these questions conclusively. Yet, when read serially, the testimonies on behalf of converts repeatedly suggest the oversimplification of complex itineraries, the glossing over of inconvenient details, and the irreconcilable contradictions between the testimonies of witnesses linked to converts and their masters in dense ties of patronage and outright dependence. These narratives both attest to the link between conversion and the vagaries of colonial and domestic subordination, and seek to erase their traces.

### *Categorizing persons*

Before closing, a brief discussion is in order of the differing images of conversion and converthood as they emerge from the documents produced by the House of Catechumens. The House was established in 1557 to shelter, instruct and ultimately baptize its Muslim and Jewish charges. The main genres of documentation in its archives were records of neophytes' baptism and departure, on the one hand, and notes from meetings of the House's Board of Governors on the other. Both types of documentation were produced under very similar circumstances: in short proximity to the events they describe, by persons who were House priors or clerks, and for consumption by the same milieu of priors, members of the institution's gubernatorial board, and Venetian government and ecclesiastical officials. Yet they were organized around quite distinct logics. Both these genres are highly significant for reconstructing converts' life trajectories, and for suggesting the ways in which such trajectories did or did not fit pre-existing patterns and governors' expectations. Beyond that, these genres, when read against each other, allow us to ask how their producers and readers understood the institution of which they were part, and how they imagined the process of conversion and the making of converted subjects.

The House of Catechumens' baptismal records and departure registers allocated to each entry only a limited, fixed, and clearly demarcated space on the page – not more than a few lines in most cases – concretizing materially the tendency to fit catechumens into one of few, pre-established categories: 'Jew', 'Turk', 'Moor', 'child', 'slave', 'soldier', etc. The registers noted only the barest milestones in a convert's life prior to baptism, and even less of his or her whereabouts thereafter. For the most part, they only detailed when persons left the House and where to, dates on which they received disbursements from a special fund for long-time converts, and the sum given.<sup>61</sup> This stands in stark contrast to the elaborate attention to converts' conduct for decades after their baptism, characteristic of the House's meeting notes, and the range of disciplinary practices devised by the House personnel.<sup>62</sup>

The allocation of only limited space for each entry in the baptismal and departure registers, and the division of each entry into two columns to mark two discrete stages, a 'before' and an 'after' in a neophyte's life, were hardly accidental or inevitable. That these techniques were carefully observed over a long period suggests that for the purposes of the registers' compilers, the whereabouts of neophytes after baptism mattered far less than the need to count souls, prevent repeated baptisms, and ascertain the facts of baptism and departure themselves. Thus, the moments of baptism and departure represent in these genres the legal fiction of a radical break with the past, and the beginning of a new life. This legal fiction was worlds apart from the actual trajectories of Venetian converts upon baptism, as will be seen below.

While often missing much vital data, the vast majority of baptismal and departure records did not fail to register catechumens' previous, non-Christian name. As Duane Corpis notes in the context of Protestant conversion to Catholicism in early modern Augsburg, the meticulous registration of converts' previous names suggests that they 'were not perceived as vagabonds or rootless foreigners' who could not be integrated into the Catholic community.<sup>63</sup> A similar logic guided the governors of the Venetian House of Catechumens in noting down converts' names and places of origin. As we will see, rather than transitory

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<sup>61</sup> For reproductions of sample pages from both registers, see Rothman E.N., *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca: 2011).

<sup>62</sup> For a discussion of these practices, see Rothman, "Becoming Venetian".

<sup>63</sup> Corpis, *The Geography of Religious Conversion* 119.

sojourners who passed through the city on their way to another locale, converts were strongly encouraged to grow roots in Venice, and such roots were themselves often seen as indices of successful conversion. In fact, one's entry in the baptismal register marked only the beginning of a process of localization which was expected to last a lifetime. As neophytes were subjected to a host of disciplinary techniques which forever marked them as 'baptized infidels', they were also, crucially, to become part of the Venetian moral community. In a sense, as the historian David Nirenberg argues in relation to religious communities in late medieval Aragon, it was precisely such indelible marks of difference which made their bearers vital members of a community, holding an important lesson for everyone to see about God's grace and the possibility of salvation.<sup>64</sup>

Beyond 'fixing' the identities and trajectories of catechumens and neophytes through the use of a pre-determined grid, the records of the House of Catechumens are also significant in suggesting differential expectations about catechumens' intentions (and, indeed, the very possibility of an intending subject) along lines of religion and gender. Dozens of documents in the House registers vouch for Jewish male catechumen's intentions as a precondition for baptism, in phrases such as 'wishing to become Christian', 'strong will to become Christian', 'came', 'went', 'requested', or 'presented himself to become Christian', 'intentions to become Christian', 'not wishing to become Christian', 'wants to be baptized', 'tell the prior if he wants baptism', and 'hear the wish to be baptized'.<sup>65</sup>

Far less frequently do the same records ascribe individual wishes to Muslim catechumens. Of over 700 Muslim men baptized by the House of Catechumens from 1590 to 1670, the vast majority were noted in the records simply as 'admitted' or, sometimes, as 'admitted for baptism' ('accolto per battesimo'). In only six cases were individual wishes explicitly recorded.<sup>66</sup> Instead, the scribes used a range of different

<sup>64</sup> On difference as what binds together various groups in a moral community, see Nirenberg D., *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: 1996).

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Archivio delle Istituzioni di Ricovero e di Educazione (henceforth: AIRE), CAT B 4, fol. 14v, 19v, 30r, 47v, 50r, 61r, 72v, 73r, 74r, 77v, 89r; AIRE, CAT B 6, fol. 21v, 29v, 108v; ASPV, Crb, reg. 1, fol. 6v, 8v, 9v.

<sup>66</sup> One document refers to a Muslim man brought to the house by an interpreter who claimed that the man said he wanted to become Christian ('volersi far cristiano'): ASPV, Crb, reg. 1, fol. 11v (Nov. 24, 1592). The other five used the following phrases

phrases, which either skirt the question of agency and motivation, or ascribe it to someone other than the catechumen himself, be they a patron, a master, a colonial clergyman, or, indeed, the governors of the House.<sup>67</sup> This seeming lack of interest in gauging Muslim catechumens' intentions and volition prior to baptism may be connected to how Venetians interpreted the presumed socio-political ramifications of becoming Muslim in an Ottoman context, i.e. slavish submission to the Sultan. Whether this was the case or not, the marked differences between the commonsense narrative frames of Muslim-Catholic vs. Jewish-Catholic and Protestant-Catholic conversion in early modern period point once again for the need to understand the process of becoming Catholic as an articulation of a contact zone, where expectations about 'the other side' clearly informed practices of conversion and subject-making.

In the case of female catechumens too, the records often located agency outside the subject.<sup>68</sup> Of roughly 340 female catechumens recorded by the Pia Casa throughout this period, only one, a slave in the ghetto, is explicitly recorded as 'wishing to become Christian'.<sup>69</sup> In one other case, the governors decide to send a Turkish or Slavic interpreter 'to learn about [her] will and wish'.<sup>70</sup>

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to refer to slaves who 'desidera battezzarsi': AIRE, CAT B 4, fol. 28r (Jan. 7, 1593 m.v.), 'desidera andar a Roma per batezzarsi': AIRE, CAT B 4, fol. 80v (Oct. 2, 1597), 'chiede di essere battezzato': AIRE, CAT B 4, fol. 86v (June 4, 1598), 'vuol battezzarsi': AIRE, CAT B 6, fol. 22v (June 16, 1611), and 'volersi [...] battezzare' ASPV, Crb, reg. 2, fol. 52v (June 6, 1660).

<sup>67</sup> 'venuto' or 'accolto [...] per farsi battezzare': AIRE, CAT B 4, fol. 14v (March 11, 1593), fol. 20v (June 10, 1593); 'venuto per battezzarsi': AIRE, CAT B 4, fol. 86r (June 4, 1598); 'accolto per battezzarsi': AIRE, CAT B 6, fol. 164r (Jan. 30, 1619, m.v.); 'accolto per esser convertito': AIRE, CAT B 4, fol. 94r (May 27, 1599); 'mandato per farsi cristiano': AIRE, CAT B 4, fol. 63r (May 2, 1596); 'accolto [...] per farsi cristiano': AIRE, CAT B 4, fol. 93v (May 14, 1599). These phrases could obviously also be used in the case of Jews, e.g. AIRE, CAT B 4, fol. 18r (June 5, 1593), fol. 54r (Aug. 17, 1595), fol. 61v (April 4, 1596), AIRE, CAT B 6, fol. 23r (June 23, 1611), fol. 29v (Aug. 25, 1611); ASPV, Crb, reg. 1, fol. 14v (May 23, 1593); AIRE, CAT B 4, fol. 19v (May 28, 1593).

<sup>68</sup> E.g. 'mandata a battezzarsi', 'venuta per battezzarsi', 'accolta per farsi Cristiana', 'come vuole il suo protettore', 'far venire la moglie di Anzolo per farsi cristiana', 'dichiarita di non volersi battezzare p[er]ch'un tal Christian non volia sposarla': AIRE, CAT B 4, fol. 27v (Dec. 30, 1593), 62v (April 18, 1596), 78v (Aug. 27, 1597), 89v (Oct. 7, 1598); CAT B 6, fol. 158v (Oct. 17, 1619); ASPV, Crb, reg. 2, fol. 27r (May 28, 1649).

<sup>69</sup> 'vuol farsi cristiana': AIRE, CAT B 6, fol. 31r (Sept. 15, 1611).

<sup>70</sup> 'per intendere il voler et desiderio di una donna': AIRE, CAT B 4, fol. 50r (June 8, 1595).

*Conclusions*

The different genres through which conversion was documented and regimented in early modern Venice illustrate how spatiotemporal conceptions were key to the differing articulations of the process of religious conversion and its presumed product, the converted subject. The 'chronotope of conjuncture', which characterized narratives by or about Ottoman converts, conceived of religious conversion as the possibly unintended consequence of spatiotemporal transition from one spatially-defined religious community to another, and from the former's ritual time to the latter's. Conversely, the 'chronotope of purposive journeying', which characterized narratives by or about converts from Protestantism, conceived of religious conversion as the intentional, *ur-cause* (rather than default consequence) of a convert's peregrinations and possible change of status. These differences parallel the frequent reference to volition as a pre-condition for baptism in the case of male Jewish catechumens, and the almost complete lack of such references in the case of women, and Muslim men.

Identifying the paradigmatic chronotopes at work in different genres has alerted us to a tension between how converts' itineraries were narrated in reconciliation depositions to the Holy Office and in matrimonial examinations by the Venetian Patriarch, on the one hand, and in baptismal and departure records of the House of Catechumens, on the other hand. Inquisitorial depositions often linked the transition from one religious community to another with geographical mobility and with significant ritual moments in deponents' lifecycle. They envisioned the (re)turn to Christianity as a journey, with the Venetian metropole as an endpoint, both physical and spiritual. Matrimonial examinations also frequently linked conversion with geographical journeys, although in this genre mobility was sometimes reduced to 'plausible', itineraries from 'there' to 'here'. This tendency to simplify complex itineraries is even more tangible in records produced by the House of Catechumens. Rather than as journeys with multiple stops, potential complications, detours, and delays, these institutional archives crystallized converts' biographies into three crucial dates: arrival at the House, baptism, and departure, mediated via a limited set of pre-given categories of vital data, such as place of provenance, age, former name and religion. Perhaps the fiction of the fixity of identity was particularly important to maintain in the face of the alchemical

transformation envisioned to take place at the baptismal font: To bring closure to a previous life sequence, its contours had to be established first. Indeed, baptismal registers visually and textually divide converts' lives into two radically separate phases, a 'before' and an 'after'. Yet, a radical break with one's previous life was rarely achieved by early modern Venetian converts. Instead, converts' pre-existing social networks repeatedly shaped their itineraries after baptism.

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*Appendix 1**Deposition of Abdone q. Giovanni of Aleppo (1616, excerpted)*

Essendo io nato christiano in Aleppo, et battezzato. dopo 10 anni in c[irc]a sono stato fatto turco et per d[et]to tempo visuto alla turchesca. et son circonciso. et hora essendo capitato à Venetia, et volendo lassar d[et]ta setta de turchi et esser buon cat[toli]co mi son in questo loco per far quanto mi sarà ordinato.

Int. che dica con che occ'one abbandonasse la fede cat[toli]ca et si facesse turco.

R.t Io caminai da giovine, et in un certo tempo che seida territorio di Tripoli alcuni turchi si erano ribellati, io andai tra di loro, et mi posi un turbante in testa, et loro mi accettarono ricercandomi chi ero, et io li risposi che ero turco. et li dissi che da piccolo era uscito fuori di casa mia, et che per questo non era tagliato, et all'hora poi mi fecero circon-cider. ma io li dissi cosi perche se li havesse detto che era christiano, mi haverebbero fatto rinegar per forza ò che mi haverebbero ammazzato, et per questo io li dissi che ero turco. Et mi lassai poi anco tagliar per l'istesso timor, perche loro se ne accorsero che non ero tagliato.

Int. per qual c'a andò cosi à seida fra turchi, et non andò fra christiani.

R.t io era stato in Gierusalem à visitar il s[an]to sepolcro come Pelegrino, et nel ritorno passai da seida non sapendo dove andar, et cosi mi compagnai fra loro, perche era anco un gran bisogno.

Int R.t avanti che io andasse in Gerusalem q'n stava à casa io tessevo delli ormesini.

Int R.t q'n mi tagliarono et mi fecero turco mi chiamarono Ebraim. Et sevi come soldato per un anno un capitano che si chiamava Magiar Mustaffa che era capo delli ribelli. Et passato poi l'anno andai nel gran Cairo, et per che niuno sapeva che io era stato turcho, mi vesti da christiano et steti fra christiani per sette anni. dopo andando verso Constantinopoli à Borsa, vi fù un turco che mi conobbe ch'ero stato turco, et accio non mi scoprisse, mene fuggi nelli confini dell'ongaria per venir in queste arti della X'pianità, ma da un barbier mi fù detto che li passi non erano sicuri, che saria stato preso come spione, et cosi per timore tornai indietro et per altre strade poi son venuto al seraglio della Bossina. Et da seraglio con alcuni mercanti turchi son venuto à Venetia, et mentre son stato con loro hò fatto alla turca, perche loro mi tenevano per turco, et credevano ch'io fosse uno di quei loro santoni che vano à cercando.

Int R.t Io non son tornato à star in Aleppo perche là si era saputo che mi era fatto turco, et non saria stato sicuro longam[en]te se bene vi son stato una volta cosi per passaggio doi mesi, et andava in chiesa come Christiano.

Source: ASVe, Santo Uffizio, Processi, box 71, file Abdone q. Giovanni Sensale d'Aleppo (April 14, 1616).

*Appendix 2*  
*Deposition of Pierre Blanche (1631)*

[...] Io ho seguitato la vita di mio padre nutrito et allevato nella setta et heresie di calvino [...] et essendo io partito dal mio paese l'anno passato del mese di ott[ob]re mi trattenuti nel Piamonte alcuni mesi, medicando secondo la mia p[ro]fess[i]one et finalm[en]te già 5 mesi in c[irc]a veni à venetia, et son stato al lazareto vechio c[irc]a tre mesi, et poi in Venetia, et doppio che io son partito di francia, hò sempre havuto in pensiero di lasciare quella setta heretica di calvino, et farmi cat[toli]co perche in franza viddi alcuni miracoli et altrove più in Italia, fatti dalla B[eat]a Vergine, onde mi risolsi determinatam[en]te di farmi Cat[toli]co anzi feci voto di andar à Roma, et andarò a Genova à far contum[ati]a et alli giorni passati andai à S. franc[esc]o di Paola dal P. Confessore che è qui p[rese]nte et ostendit p[er]sona sup[er] P. Ignatio Correctore Percio conoscendo io di essa stato in errore graviss[im]o havendo tenuto osservato et creduto tutto quello che tiene vede et osserva la setta calvinista, et conoscendo esser vera la fede cat[toli]ca et ap[ostoli]ca Rom[an]a instantam[en]te dimando à q[uest]o s[antissi]mo trib[una]le di esser reconsiliato alla s[an]ta chiesa cat[toli]ca et ap[ostoli]ca Rom[an]a.

Source: ASVe, Santo Uffizio, Processi, box 88 (Oct. 16, 1631).

*Appendix 3*  
*Deposition of Maddalena q. Melin Turca (1647)*

Jo son nata nel territorio della città de clini, sopra sebenico tre giornate, di padre, et m[ad]re christiani, mio padre si chiamava melin contadino e soldato, mia m[ad]re chiamavasi chiarana; ambedue morsero. Jo non

sò che nome mi fù imposto, q[uand]o fui battezzata, et maddalena mia sorella che non sò se sia viva ò morta, mi disse che fui battezzata. Et son stata con mio padre sino alla mia età de 10 anni in c[irc]a Et corrigens se ipsam, dixit. Steti con mio p[ad]re sino alla età di 5 anni, che all'ora fui levata dalli parenti di mio p[ad]re turchi, e mi condussero à Zemonico, dove fui allevata, e chiamata p[er] nome Rachima, et mi fecero vivere secondo la legge turchesca, et mi maritorono da un turco chiamato Fasula, che non sò se sia vivo ne morto, ma non hò havuto fig[lio]li. Et hò 50 anni in c[irc]a. et per tutto questo tempo hò vissuto alla turchesca. et mi conformai à quelli riti maometani. Hora essendo capitata in q[uest]a Citta Cat[toli]ca essendo stata amaestrata per 40 giorni circa nella casa de catecumeni nelli a[arti]c[o]li della s[an]ta fede cat[toli]ca vedo che N. S. Giesù x'p sia dio, nato di maria vergine. che vi siano 3 p[er]sone divine. che siano 7 li savi' della chiesa. et universalm[en]te tengo e credo tutto quello che tiene e crede la s[an]ta m[adre] chiesa. Et perciò son pronta ad abiurare, e vivere e morire in questa s. fede [christ]iana.

Source: ASVe, Santo Uffizio, Processi, box 103, file *Madalena q. Melin Turca* (June 4, 1647).

#### *Appendix 4* *Deposition of Anna Frai (1630)*

Son comparsa in q[uest]o s[an]to off[iti]o à denontiar me stessa, come essendo nata, nutrita et allevata da padre et m're et in paesi de luterani, hò sempre tenuto et creduto tutto quello che insegua la setta di luterò eccettando che hò creduto vi sia il purgatorio, et anco la intercessione de santi. Finalui che essendo venuta in cognit[ion]e del mio errore per le prediche et essortationi del P. fra Giacomo sud[et]to mi son risoluta di ridarmi al grembo della s[an]ta Chiesa Cat[toli]ca, detestando in tutto et per tutto, tutto quello che contraddite à d[et]ta s[an]ta Chiesa, confermo p[ro]posito di credere per l'avvenire et osservare quello che tiene, crede et insegna la s[an]ta m[adre] Chiesa Cat[toli]ca. Perciò humilm[en]te supplico q[uest]o s[an]to tribunale à volermi reconciliare à d[et]ta s[an]ta m[adre] chiesa.

Source: ASVe, Santo Uffizio, Processi, box 88, (June 4, 1630).

*Appendix 5*  
*Deposition of Marco Lombardo (1632)*

Già sei ani in c[irc]a ritrovandomi in Alessandria nell vassello di Pelegrin di Rossi nel quale ero come nobile, et ricercando le mie frage mi fò dato un schiaffo, all'hora che i turchi mi presero p[er] salvarmi et mi condussero seco al castello ove steti 4 mesi in c[irc]a et ivi osservai le ceremonie maometane usandomi violenza con imbicagarmi con aqua di vita, et violentem[en]te mi circoncisere, et mi fecero per forza parlar turchezo, et confessai di esser turco per paura della morte che mi minacciavano, io però havevo continuam[en]te nel core Iddio, la vergine et li santi, quali sempre honorai con le mie or'oni di giorni et di notte. et senza haver fatto altre ceremonie, quello che feci lo feci con l'esterior et non mai col core. Qu[ando] poi hò veduto il tempo opportuno mi son trasferito in Nazaret et qui hò trovato un Pre[te] di S. Fran[cesc]o il quale mi hà reconciliato nella maniera che si puo vedere dalla fede dalla lui fattami, qual hora p'nto nel s.[ant]o off[iti]o. Hora dolente et pentito dimando à dio p[er] dono et à q[uest]o s[antissi]mo trib[una]le di esser reconciliato alla s[an]ta fede p[ro]mettendo di viver p[er] l'avvenire da buono et vero cat[toli]co et sono pochi giorni che son ritornato à Ven[eti]a cioè 15 giorni in c[irc]a, et doppo che son fugito dalli turchi son sempre vissuto alla Cat[toli]ca et mi son confessato et co[mun]icato in Nazaret 3 volte in 8 giorni che dimorai di Nazaret, et un'altra ritrovandomi al Zante.

Source: ASVe, Santo Uffizio, Processi, box 88 (Nov. 8, 1632).

PART TWO

AGENCY





‘MOST NECESSARILY TO BE KNOWNE’:  
THE CONVERSION NARRATIVES OF SAMUEL SMITH

Philip Major

Early modern conversion narratives have received an increased measure of critical attention in recent years. Yet, though the basic structure of this influential genre has been elucidated, excavation of its various layers of meaning remains incomplete. In this essay, I examine two hitherto neglected texts written by the Church of England minister and author Samuel Smith (1584–1665). Both of these, *The Admirable Convert* and *The Ethiopian Eunuchs Conversion*, allow us to investigate the modes of thought and argument attendant on both the authorship and reception of such works. Each can stand on its own as an essentially orthodox Church of England exposition of conversion. Both published in 1632, however, they can also, and more usefully, be interpreted as complementary companion pieces, the one concerned with a thief and the other a powerful court official.<sup>1</sup>

Among their key features is the balancing of Biblical exemplars with the impossibility or inappropriateness of direct imitation, which provokes an analysis of the central issue of agency in conversion. This in turn informs a discussion of how Smith perforce delicately attends to the possibility of backsliding in readers for whom an ongoing process of redemption is privileged over the velleity of immediate and final conversion. What helps to make these books of particular interest is that, for political reasons outlined below, only a small number of Puritan conversion narratives were published in England between Richard Kilby’s *Hallelu-iah: Praise Yee the Lord, for the Unburthening of a Loaden Conscience* (1614) and the early 1650s.<sup>2</sup> In addition, significantly more scholarship has been devoted to the ‘spiritual autobiography’ mode of

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<sup>1</sup> For the various connotations of ‘eunuch’, see Fitzmyer, J.A., *The Anchor Bible: The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: 1998) 412. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer of this chapter for offering several helpful suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> Hindmarsh, D.B., *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: 2005) 42.

conversion narrative than to Smith's exegetical format which privileges exemplification over self-promotion.

The main factional lines in both of Smith's conversion narratives are drawn between orthodox Protestantism and Rome rather than to highlight internal Protestant schism, though given the pro-Catholic perception by Puritans in the 1630s of the Established Church hierarchy in England, under Archbishop William Laud, the distinction between the two is seldom clearly defined. Either way, Smith is principally drawing on what might be termed an 'interfaith' meaning of conversion. This refers to a change from one religion to another, or from one denomination to another, for instance from Catholicism to a version of Protestantism. However, as we shall see, the notion of 'spiritual' conversion, connoting a broad 'turning to God', is also upheld by Smith, particularly so in the case of *The Admirable Convert*. Indeed, the differences between these concepts are arguably not absolute, and there may be some deliberate interplay between them in Smith's narratives.

In the pantheon of early modern English clerics, Samuel Smith has yet to secure a place. A Church of England minister in Essex and then, from 1631 to 1660, in rural Shropshire, Smith is in many ways the quintessentially diligent – and largely anonymous – English country clergyman. In most canonical accounts of the period he is overlooked.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, excepting the literature on Shropshire and his native Worcestershire, he rarely features in secondary works on the period. However, Smith was also a writer, 'one of the most popular writers in divinity in his day'.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the quantity and nature of his works betray a literary legacy which is not without import for scholars of seventeenth-century religion. Supporting evidence for Smith's contemporary prominence is provided by the company he kept. Within the Puritan wing of the Church of England in the mid-seventeenth-century, and, later, within nonconformity itself, there are few more towering figures than Richard Baxter (1615–1691), the ejected minister and religious writer who, like Smith, remained an adherent of the English Church in the 1630s, but then subsequently became a Presbyterian.<sup>5</sup> Among those of his fellow Shropshire ministers who made a deep impression on Baxter in his formative years, and who remained lifelong companions, it is

<sup>3</sup> For example, in *Walker Revised; being a revision of John Walker's Sufferings of the clergy during the Grand Rebellion, 1642–60*, ed. A.G. Matthews (Oxford, 1948, repr. 1988).

<sup>4</sup> *Notes & Queries*, 3rd ser. iv (Dec. 19, 1863) 501.

<sup>5</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, henceforth ODNB.

clear that Smith was foremost. Baxter fondly recalls in his lengthy and thoughtful autobiography, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, that as a young man

God was pleased much to comfort and settle me by the acquaintance of some Reverend peacable Divines [...] especially old Mr. Samuel Smith, sometime of Prittlewell in Essex, but then of Cressage in Shropshire [...]. This good Man was one of my most familiar Friends, in whose converse I took very much delight; who was buried about the Winter 1664 at his native place at Dudley in Worcestershire.<sup>6</sup>

Baxter is quick to emphasise the extent of Smith's literary corpus, which had supplied him with significant doctrinal nourishment. He relates that Smith 'hath written on the 6th of Hosea, the first Psalm, the 23rd Psalm, the 51st Psalm, the Eunuch's Conversion, Noah's Dove, the Great Assize, and other Books'.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, as Baxter indicates, this was not the full extent of Smith's devotional output. By 1632 the 'other Books' he had already written included a popular commentary on Psalm 1,  *Davids Blessed Man* (1614), written while rector of Roxwell, in Essex.  *Davids Repentance* followed in 1614 and 1616, and  *Christs Last Supper* in 1620. His last new work was  *Pattern of Free Grace* (1658), but such was the popularity of Smith's writings that many further editions of them, in particular  *The Great Assize*, were published up to – and beyond – his death.

#### *Title terms and prefatory material: signposting key themes*

Any close examination of  *The Admirable Convert* and  *The Ethiopian Eunuchs Conversion* must deal first with the significance of their title terms. A number of coterminous works written in English on conversion use the same titular configuration comprising a conspicuous definite article:  *The True Convert*, by Nehemiah Rogers, for example, first published in 1620 and again in 1632; Niccolò Balbani's  *The Italian Convert*, published in 1635 and 1639; and Thomas Shepherd's  *The Sincere Convert* (1640). This matters, since in this format questions of provenance and authenticity provide significant expository building blocks for the main edifice of exemplification. In terms of provenance, the 'Italian' and 'Ethiopian' convert signal the illimitable range of God's

<sup>6</sup>  *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, ed. M. Sylvester (London, Matthew Sylvester: 1696) I.9.

<sup>7</sup>  *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, ed. M. Sylvester (London, Matthew Sylvester: 1696) I.9.

grace.<sup>8</sup> In so doing, they also lend the conversion narrative a sense of exotic literary locale.<sup>9</sup> This is a literary device which playwrights from Marlowe and Shakespeare onwards had used so effectively in peopling their dramas with assorted Venetians, Milanese and North Africans, transporting Londoners into new dramatic worlds.<sup>10</sup>

With regards to authenticity, the title *The Admirable Convert* places sole emphasis on the quality of the convert rather than the conversion process *per se*. The subject himself is to be esteemed, foregrounding the narrative, in which even before he has 'fully' converted he is described in glowing terms, as one who bears 'the happie fruite of sanctified afflictions' (164). This touches on the knotty contemporary theological argument about the extent to which an individual can help to effect his own conversion, or prepare the way for it. Smith acknowledges the misleading one-sidedness – in doctrinal terms – of his title. Careful semantic calibration is evident, for while the main title focuses exclusively on the person converted, the subtitle counterbalances this by drawing attention to the all-sufficient presence of God's hand.

The subtitle reads: 'the miraculous Conversion of the Thiefe on the Crosse'. Here, 'miraculous' clearly connotes divine agency, while the new emphasis on conversion rather than convert brings to bear a countervailing passivity on the role of the thief. Conversion is, in these fuller terms, something unequivocally done *by* God *to* sinners. The subject's reduction in status from 'the admirable convert' to the impersonal 'Thiefe on the Crosse' eliminates any misconceptions about the convert's 'admirable' qualities being innate. Even so, there is a residual tension in

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<sup>8</sup> Arthur Peake notes that the Ethiopian's conversion 'may foreshadow the extension of the [Christian] mission to the farthest parts of the world'; *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, ed. M. Black and H.H. Rowley (London: 1962) 897. In this respect, it should be noted that 'Ethiopia', in both its Biblical and early modern sense, was not merely a single nation but a generic word for lands south of Egypt and modern-day Sudan.

<sup>9</sup> A feature consonant with recent scholarship positing the early modern sermon 'as theatrical [...] as literary art inextricably engaged in the public sphere'; *The English Sermon Revised: Religion, Literature and History 1600–1750*, ed. L.A. Ferrels – P. McCullough (Manchester: 2000) 2.

<sup>10</sup> Whatever misgivings Smith has about the Ethiopian's suitability for imitation by his readers, they pointedly do not include his cultural otherness. For a delineation of and challenge to the modern ethnographic, anthropological and theological view that 'conversion to Christianity is whatever an indigenous people make of it', see Wood P., "Boundaries and Horizons", in Hefner R.W. (ed.), *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation* (Berkeley – Los Angeles: 1993) 305–321.

the entirety of the title, a tension played out by Smith in the book itself. Appearing on a separate line, though remaining within the subtitle, is the wording 'With the finall Impenitency of the other'. Two of the leitmotifs of the *The Admirable Convert*, penitence and impenitence, are thus instantly drawn to the reader's attention, while the deliberate cursoriness of 'the other' complements that of 'the Thiefe'.

The title terms of *The Admirable Convert* thus represent a conflation, if not necessarily a wholly convincing synthesis, of key conversion themes addressed in the main narrative: the function of the convert himself; the decisive role of God; and a minatory warning of the baleful consequence of impenitence – exclusion from the conversion process. Finally, the attribution of the work to 'Samuel Smith, Minister of the Word of God' betrays a stress on the Bible and its implicit vernacularization and accessibility which is freighted with denominational significance, reinforced as it is by the absence of visually ornamenting frontispieces. It signals Smith's aggressively Protestant frame of reference, doubtless a response to the resurgence of Catholicism in 1630s' England. This resurgence was manifested in 'the spread of anti-Calvinist theology, the claims of the bishops to episcopacy by divine right, and the increase in episcopal influence at the highest levels of government'.<sup>11</sup>

The full title of *The Ethiopian Eunuchs Conversion* is similarly revealing. Its subtitle reads: 'The summe of thirtie Sermons upon part of the eight[h] Chapter of the Acts'. Again, the author is described as a 'Minister of the Word', and the details of the printer and publisher are the same: the books are 'Printed by Thomas Harper, for Thomas Alchorne,<sup>12</sup> and are to be sold at his shop in Pauls Church-yard, at the signe of the Greene Dragon, 1632'.

As with their full titles, the prefatory material of *The Admirable Convert* and *The Ethiopian Eunuchs Conversion* demands close attention. Both works carry dedications and prefaces of moment, successfully linking the specific and the local with the general and the universal. Patronage had already played a significant part in Smith's literary output.  *Davids Blessed Man* was dedicated to Sir Robert Rich, second earl of Warwick, and his wife, Frances, when Smith was an Essex minister.

<sup>11</sup> Solt L.F., *Church and State in Early Modern England, 1509–1640* (Oxford: 1990) 196.

<sup>12</sup> London publisher and bookseller, fl. 1627–1639.

Sir Ferdinando Dudley and his wife, Honor, meanwhile, were the dedicatees of *Christs Last Supper*. In the case of *The Admirable Convert*, the dedicatees are 'The right worshipfull, Sir Richard Greeves, Knight, one of his Majesties Justices of the Peace [...] for the Countie of Worcester, and [...] the virtuous and religious Lady, the Lady Anne Greeves his wife'. *The Ethiopian Eunuchs Conversion* is dedicated to another JP and knight of the realm, Sir Richard Newport, from Salop.

It is noteworthy that the ideological as well as denominational leanings of Smith's patrons vary considerably. For example, Warwick is described as 'a consistent supporter of the Puritan cause in the nobility' and a 'patron of orthodox Calvinist interest'.<sup>13</sup> In the 1640s, Newport, by contrast, had his estate sequestered by parliament for being a loyalist.<sup>14</sup> It is this political divergence which makes it difficult to discern with any assurance the influence of patronage in Smith's theology.<sup>15</sup> This is not to say that such influence was absent; as has recently been argued, 'Honor, loyalty, friendship, affection, kinship, civic duty, devotion to the common weale: these bonds had themselves a sacred character that might reinforce or complicate a person's confessional allegiance'.<sup>16</sup> In theology more than in any other subject area it would have been unthinkable for an author like Smith to have expressed views broadly out of sympathy with those of his patron. Indeed, though Smith's narratives fall outside the popular conversion sub-genre of autobiography, and therefore give us few clues as to his own experience of conversion, it is well established that ecclesiastical conversion itself could be contingent on the economic exigencies of clerical employment.<sup>17</sup>

The question of patronage opened up by these dedications is an important one. Clerical patronage has enjoyed significant scholarly

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<sup>13</sup> ODNB.

<sup>14</sup> Morgan J.E., "Ecclesiastical History of Shropshire during the Civil War, Commonwealth and Restoration", *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society*, 3rd ser., 7, 241–310, 278.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Donagan has found of ministers in Essex that 'on examination they prove broken reeds in any argument for Warwick's use of his livings as vital to the welfare of Puritanism in Essex': Donagan B., "The Clerical Patronage of Robert Rich, Second Earl of Warwick, 1619–1642", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 120, 5 (1976) 388–419, 394.

<sup>16</sup> Kaplan B.J. (ed.), *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MS: 2007) 9.

<sup>17</sup> Questier M., *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580–1625* (Cambridge: 1996) 42–49.

coverage in recent years, yet the particularities of the relationship between patron and client in respect of conversion narratives less so. Again, the presence of formulaic modes of address needs to be factored in: there are several studiously modest references by Smith to 'this poore worke', professions of regret that the dedicatees 'deserve a greater gift, and better Present then I am able to give', commendations 'humbly craving pardon for my boldness', and so on. Yet close inspection reveals the presaging of key doctrinal elements in the texts themselves. In this respect, it is the concluding sections to each dedication that merit the closest attention. In his dedication to Greeves, Smith envisions his patron releasing 'these collections' to the wider public:

And now Right Worshipfull, I beseech you that the world may receive them at your hands, and under your name, which why should I doubt of, since your zeale for Gods house, love of the truth, with that encouragement you daily give to such as brings the tidings of peace, may assure mee that a Present of this nature, cannot but bee acceptable unto you.<sup>18</sup>

Reference to 'the world' communicates neither an incongruously inflated expectation of potential readership, nor a flattering allusion to the wide arc of Greeves's influence. Rather, it imaginatively registers a half-separation between patron and the world, with Greeves located, flatteringly, in a liminal space between temporality and 'Gods house'. What qualifies Greeves to occupy this space is not just his general 'love of the truth', but 'that encouragement you daily give to such as brings the tidings of peace'. This dovetails neatly with the subject matter of the book, and the way it is treated. For the emphasis on the diurnal touches on one of the key messages Smith wishes to convey – that conversion does not constitute a single, transient event but a lifelong process of transformation. Thus, the signal purpose of the book, according to its dedication, is to provide the requisite additional spiritual fortification to someone (Greeves) who is already an exemplar. Smith hopes his work

may add to the benefit and good of Gods Church, and further the worke of Repentance, which these times call for, as my hope is through Gods mercy it may. And that you and yours, who deserve so large a measure of honor & respect from Gods Church, may be further encouraged in your godly course.

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<sup>18</sup> The dedications in both works are unpaginated.

Within the context of a conversion narrative, then, Greeves and his wife, in the author's eyes, have not yet 'arrived', but rather remain embarked on a journey,<sup>19</sup> a 'course', a continuing road toward redemption:

And thus I commend you both to God, and to the word of his grace, who is able to build you up further, and to give you at last an Inheritance amongst all those that are truly sanctified.

In the *Ethiopian Eunuchs Conversion*, direct references to Sir Richard Newport again focus, appositely enough, on the patron's evident and exemplary piety, though additional themes also briefly surface. Smith has, for example,

so constantly heard of your most religious respect unto our *Tribe*, and love to the truth. Blessed be his Name that hath so engraven this part of his image upon you, whereby a good evidence is ministered unto your own heart, that you are translated from death to life.

The factionalism connoted by '*Tribe*' is an early indicator that Smith seeks to confront rather than escape the denominational controversies endemic in early modern religious literature, in his case from a broadly Protestant perspective. The complementary metaphors of 'engraven' and 'translated' reiterate the passive aspect of conversion, the pervasive and predominant agency of God. But 'translated', which features on a number of occasions in both texts, has a further function. It reflects the important semantic and linguistic elements of the conversion process. In this sense, the overarching Protestant emphasis on the sufficiency of scripture which suffuses both works melds with Smith's own literary style – explicatory but emphatically not (in a Catholic sense) mediatory.

The other key word here is 'evidence'. Recognition of insincere or incomplete conversion, and the corresponding need to test for genuine change, looms large in Smith's narratives. Early modern Catholic and Protestant authors across Europe demonstrate the same imperative.<sup>20</sup> Transparently 'good evidence' has been provided – discreetly enough

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<sup>19</sup> As Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe has written in an early modern New England context, 'Membership in the church signified that one was truly on the road, not that one had already arrived at the destination'; Hambrick-Stowe Ch.E., *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill: 1982) 87.

<sup>20</sup> See Forster M.R., "The Practice and Perils of Mixed Marriage", in *Piety and Family in Early Modern Europe*, ed. B.J. Kaplan (Basingstoke: 2005) 161.



to himself ('unto your own heart') – of the authenticity of Newport's own conversion. Yet, as we shall witness, this only casts into bolder relief the numerous examples of false 'translations' laid bare in the rest of the book.

However, it is the dedication's fitting concentration on exemplification and yet also on the cumulative nature of conversion that catches the eye. Smith commends "The Noble Ethiopian to your imitation' in the same way that Newport himself is extolled as a paragon of godliness. For all Newport's laudable piety, though, he must, like Greeves, stay on the same path:

Continue herein, and let your works be more at last then at first; I dare promise your conscience more true tranquillity herein, and your person more honour, then the whole world besides can afford you.

The discretion with which such narratives perforce address their dedicatees thus blends felicitously with the notion of ongoing rather than sudden change wrought by conversion. If an author of such narratives, *pace* the epiphanic conversion narrative style of St Paul and St Augustine, sometimes wished to 'minimize the contrast between his former and present self',<sup>21</sup> clearly the same strategy could – and perhaps should – with equal profit be applied to his patron.

### *Preaching and exemplification*

The dedicatory sections of both works which do not directly focus on Greeves and Newport are also of significance. For these, too, telescope key themes. In *The Ethiopian Eunuchs Conversion*, which was published shortly before *The Admirable Convert*, Smith prefaces his exposition of conversion itself with a sweeping distillation of Christian tenets:

The whole bodie of Theologie, may well bee rendered into these two heads, *The knowledge of God, and of our selves*; the latter consists principally in the knowledge, first of a mans natural misery: secondly, of his self-insufficiencie to come out thereof: And thirdly, the All-sufficiencie that is in Christ.

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<sup>21</sup> Pollmann J., "A Different Road to God: The Protestant Experience of Conversion in the Sixteenth Century", in Veer P. van de, *Conversion to Modernities: The Globalization of Christianity* (New York – London: 1996) 47–64, 52.

Here, Smith focuses his attention on the principal Christian dyad of man's fallen state and Christ's redemptive power. This allows him to establish an imperative of knowledge which helps justify both his book and his clerical profession.<sup>22</sup> For into this deceptively simple equation steps the minister of the word:

And all sound preaching, that aymes at the conversion of hearers, must ayme at these things as most necessarily to be knowne, to life and salvation. The subject matter of the ensuing History of the Eunuchs Conversion, is excellent to this purpose, if the workmanship be sutable.

The stress hereby placed on preaching points up and complements the subtitle and content of the book. It also chimes in harmony with *The Admirable Convert*, whose own vindictory dedication rests on the notion that 'the good content my hearers had at the publicke preaching of the same, was no small motive unto mee to present the same things to their eares, which were so acceptable to their hearts'. However, the degree to which the purpose of preaching *per se* in converting sinners seamlessly translates into the core function of a written text of sermons is not as clear as it may first seem. This raises issues surrounding intentions and outcomes when literature supplants (or supplements) aural instruction as the chosen mode of communication. That is, to what extent is an early modern conversion narrative designed to replicate the conversionary effects of a sermon, and if it is not so designed, what are its principal goals? As Andrew Pettegree has reminded us, 'In the early modern world most information was conveyed in public, communal settings: the market place, the church, a proclamation from the town hall steps'.<sup>23</sup> This usefully qualifies the modern, academic perception of the book as the primary instrument of change in the Reformation and post-Reformation era. In this context the printed word becomes merely a reinforcement of that message, if a highly popular and effective one, not its chief agent. And this in turn trains attention on early modern reading practices: the residually aural mode of reception implied by 'to their eares' reminds us that many readers at this time, when they read to themselves, would still read aloud. Nevertheless, at this stage Smith's nonconformist leanings stop short of advocating the voluntary verbal covenants favoured by

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<sup>22</sup> This emphasis on knowledge was later placed with alacrity by Baxter. See Keeble N.H., *Richard Baxter, Puritan Man of Letters* (Oxford: 1982) 36–39.

<sup>23</sup> Pettegree A., *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge: 2005) 8.

some Puritan churches. In these covenants, ordinary men and women would be asked to give oral testimony of their conversion experience as a condition of membership.<sup>24</sup>

It is noteworthy that Smith views the theme of exemplification through the lens of 'History', a word he employs on a number of occasions. On one level this provides gravitas and scholarly rigour to the dissemination of knowledge which he is professedly engaged in. By couching the story of the eunuch's conversion in terms of history the author asserts the experiential reality of the subject matter at hand. It is this historical underpinning which helps render his material 'excellent to this purpose'. However, the explicit categorisation of history also, and intentionally, generates a distancing effect between reader and exemplar. For Smith, this effect provides a necessary qualification to the appropriateness and indeed possibility of imitation: in *The Admirable Convert's* dedication the author is at pains to stress that 'the conversion of this man was not ordinary [...] particular examples are not to be urged [...] in so weighty a matter, as [...] salvation'. Conversion can never be simply a matter of following a model since it is private and individual. It is a corrective which is applied with equal force to the eunuch.

Witnessed in both narratives, then, is a paradoxically cautious delineation of the appropriateness and capacity of the subject at hand to both convey and help effect conversion. The ballast of history, in concert with exemplification, contributes fully to the pervasively didactic impulse, but tensions are evident. There are clear signs that preaching occupies a more elevated position than literature in Smith's notional conversionary hierarchy. Moreover, given the personal nature of conversion (a pointedly Reformed position) specific exemplars from the annals of history have their limitations as well as their advantages. Into this mix goes the quality of the author's work. For while 'if the workmanship be sutable' is in one sense merely another disarmingly modest caveat, the strikingly artisanal aspect of 'workmanship' underlines how the contingency of conversion incorporates literary craftsmanship. That is, if the cleric/writer has a role to play in the conversion process, his literary abilities ought to be of sufficient merit.

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<sup>24</sup> See Caldwell P., *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: the beginnings of American expression* (Cambridge: 1983) 50.

Given the manifestly universal concerns of his subject, another surprisingly pragmatic acknowledgement by Smith surrounds the excess of conversion literature already available to his readers. The dedication to *The Admirable Convert* commences thus:

It may bee wondred at of many, especially in these daies wherein there is such a satietie, if not a surfet of bookes, and that upon this subject of *Repentance*, that I should thus carry timber to the Wood, or water to the Sea. And the rather for that my late publication of my exercises of the same subject, *The Eunuchs Conversion*.

The subsequent justifications for yet another such book are again indicative of the complex blend of authorial ambition and agency characteristic of this literature. Smith, as we have seen, wishes, first, 'to present the same things to their [his readers'] eares, which were so acceptable to their hearts'. It is the implicit collaboration and interplay which is of value here, both in this line, between author and reader, and also the next, involving God: 'And oh that the Lord would be pleased to co-operate to make them partakers of that saving grace'. We thus find presented in the dedication the triangulation of author, reader and deity, the notion that for 'sound' conversion to take place each element in this triumvirate must be present. Saving grace is ascribed to God alone, but God is one of three coordinates to be plotted by (or for) the would-be convert: first the word must be delivered by the minister/author; then the recipient must imbibe it; and finally he must actively partake of God's grace.

Smith also adduces a critical and exegetical lacuna for tackling the story of the thief on the cross in *The Admirable Convert*: 'there hath bin none in our Church (for ought I know) that hath fully handled the History'. On this point Smith seems to be technically correct. Indeed, the same could be said of the story of the Ethiopian eunuch. Much neglected by the early Church, The Book of Acts *per se* had certainly been subject to scholarly scrutiny by 1632 (by Calvin in the 1550s and Hugo Grotius in the 1620s), yet detailed examination of the specific story of the eunuch, at least as manifested in a monograph, had yet to be undertaken from within the English Church.<sup>25</sup> Therefore there is significance in Smith's words beyond the additional, fleeting reference to denominational partisanship betrayed by 'our Church', and – once

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<sup>25</sup> See Gasque W.W., *A History of the Criticism of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) 8–13.

more – the appropriation of ‘history’ as a legitimate literary means to conversion. This significance lies in the concept that unexplored or under-explored individual episodes from the Bible, those yet to be ‘fully handled’, represent important intellectual and scholarly gaps in our knowledge. And these gaps *ipso facto*, regardless of any practical application, require plugging. This is not to say that a practical appeal is absent: Smith’s final stated reason for writing *The Admirable Convert* is that

no one place of Scripture, or example of Gods mercy, is more abused then this of the *Penitent*; for alas, how many desperate sinners have beene imboldened to sinne by his example? for what, say they, did not the Thiefe on the Crosse, at last repent, and was he not saved? Not considering, that repentance is Gods gift.

Smith vigorously counters such conveniently and dismayingly erroneous interpretations of the story of the thief with the argument that ‘particular examples are not to be urged for a general practice’. Again, it is only in very particular circumstances, he stresses, that God employs exemplification to bring a sinner to salvation. His readers should comprehend and reflect upon the selectivity and rarity of such cases, that is,

how Christ now upon a speciall occasion to shew the effect of his bloud, the power of his sufferings, and to manifest to the sinfull world, the truth of his Godhead, even at the lowest ebbe of his humiliation, would convert a sinner.

Those who would continue knowingly to misread and misappropriate the story of the thief, and thus remain impenitent, are the prime object of Smith’s attention. Moreover, it is the fate of damnation awaiting the multitude in this impenitent condition which hammers home the crucial role of the minister in conversion:

This being the condition of so many in the world, oh how doth it concerne every faithfull Minister of Christ, to strike oft upon this string, to presse hard upon this duty, and to bring them to see (if it be possible) their miserable condition of an impenitent life. These are the motives that have so prevailed, to bring these collections to light.

True to Smith’s word, the attention given in the main sections of both conversion narratives to the task and, concomitantly, the necessary qualities, of the clergy is substantial. The opening six sub-headings in the *Ethiopian Eunuchs Conversion* neatly illustrate this:

Ministers must discharge their duties, notwithstanding all appearance of danger; Faithfull Ministers most subject to persecutions; Good Angels serve for the good of Gods people; God will teach men by men; Good Ministers sometimes discouraged when they see not the fruite of their Ministry; Ministers must be called before they preach.

Additional chapters on clerical duties are interpolated throughout the remainder of the work, including: 'Ministers must still have a calling for that they doe; Ministers to instruct in private, as preach in publike; Holy duties must be performed with understanding; Ministers must choose special texts on speciall occasions; The calling of a Minister a laborious calling'. The prevalence of such chapters illustrates a fundamental point about the book – that fellow ministers are a core element in Smith's target audience. In this way, then, his conversion narratives are a kind of insider's manual for would-be converters; they are not intended for potential or actual converts exclusively, but for those who would convert them or keep them on the right road. That is to say, Smith is writing with a readership of clergymen in mind – preachers addressing their congregations in church. In this respect, in the case of the *Ethiopian Eunuchs Conversion* Philip is the clerical paradigm. Thus Smith's conversion narratives provide the 'map for the spiritual geography of the soul' manifested in countless books written by preachers, especially of a Puritan persuasion, in the early modern period, beginning with William Perkins's influential *Golden Chain*.<sup>26</sup> And local factors again rear their head: in the implicit dichotomy between faithful and unfaithful ministers presented here lurks an oblique censure of inadequate 1620s' and 1630s' Shropshire clerics; a deprecation that his close friend Baxter was memorably and trenchantly to render explicit.<sup>27</sup>

### *Nonconformist and Reformed*

While the content of both books unambiguously pivots on the theme of conversion, it is also the case, as we have seen, that the occasion of conversion allows Smith to ramify his convictions into many different areas of religious life and theological controversy. Conversion, that is, supplies the springboard for a wider discourse on fundamental

<sup>26</sup> Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative* 37.

<sup>27</sup> See Collinson P., *The Religion of Protestants: the Church in English Society 1559–1625* (Oxford: 1982) 93.

questions such as clerical suitability and judgement. And in this observation, above all others, it is necessary to place these works in their contemporary politico-religious context. Most significantly, the 1630s was an epoch which in England saw the assertion of a Laudian and Arminian anti-predestinarian soteriology privileging sacrament over word. The Puritan literary reaction was swift, centring on the perceived nefarious impact across the country of Catholic cultural influence. It found notoriously vivid – and far-reaching – expression in the publication of the Puritan pamphleteer William Prynne's violently anti-Catholic *Histrionomastix* in 1632.<sup>28</sup> Prynne's prosecution and ear-cropping over this publication demonstrates the hazardous nature of writing polemically Puritan literature during the 1630s, when press censorship under Laud was at its most stringent.

It is this increasingly febrile contemporary political environment which helps explain both the tenor of Smith's writings and why few conversion narratives even of his (at this time) modestly Puritan religious temper went into print before the English Revolution of the 1640s was firmly established. By no means as astringently anti-papal as other religious works of this period, *The Ethiopian Eunuchs Conversion* and *The Admirable Convert* nevertheless give unequivocally Protestant voice to post-Reformation doctrinal and ecclesiastical disputes. As such, conversion supplies specific and genuine denominational points of departure, but also, in some respects, a *casus belli*. Smith's strategy is clear: to maximise the contemporary significance of the biblical narrative under scrutiny. There are many places where, in doing so, he is not necessarily centrally concerned with the act of conversion itself. In *The Admirable Convert*, for example, the humiliation of Christ on the cross provides ammunition for a sustained attack on Jews, in whom 'we may take notice of the implacable rage and malice that is in wicked and ungodly men against Christ and his members' (7). From this position, Smith approximates to these same 'men of the world' Catholics, who 'will allow no Church but such a Church as is flourishing and visible, and measure the truth of it, by the flourishing light and reputation of Ecclesiastical order'<sup>29</sup> (15).

<sup>28</sup> See "Introducing the 1630s: questions of parliaments, peace and pressure points", in *The 1630s: Interdisciplinary Essays on Culture and Politics in the Caroline era*, ed. I. Atherton, J. Sanders (Manchester: 2006) 6–10.

<sup>29</sup> In the context of 1632, a word – and sentiment – pregnant with Laudian as well as Catholic associations.

*The Ethiopian Eunuchs Conversion* exhibits its anti-papal sentiment through Smith's method of providing a lengthy commentary on each minor detail of the foundational passage, Acts 8. 26–40. Individual verses are systematically broken down into smaller clauses, often to telling effect. For example, from a five-word section of verse 30 – 'He read Isaiah the Prophet' – Smith draws cautionary lessons concerning popery. For him, this testament to the Ethiopian's undeviating reliance on and faith in the word

surely strikes at the foundation of Popish Religion: for wherein, for the most part, stands the service and worship of God that is performed amongst them, but in grosse superstition, and in the inventions of their owne braine, in the traditions of men, Popes, Councels, Cardinals, and the like, in a multitude of vaine and idle ceremonies and observations; all which have no ground or footing out of Gods word (129).

Based on only a fragment of the scripture under scrutiny, but utilising every ounce of its contemporary resonance, a prolonged attack on Catholic practices is mounted.<sup>30</sup> This is a recurrent pattern in both works.

The eunuch's baptism by Philip enables Smith to dilate on the role of this sacrament as a sign and confirmation of conversion – 'a seale of Gods covenant' (444). In the course of his exposition Smith engages with another pressing theological topic by defending infant baptism against Anabaptists.<sup>31</sup> But it is for Catholicism which most of his ire remains reserved, for since 'Faith is so necessary to the due participation of the Sacrements, this shewes that Doctrine of the Church of Rome to bee most ridiculous and absurd, that teach that Baptisme doth *ex opera operato* conferre grace' (418).

This is not to argue that Smith necessarily engages with conversion merely as a pretext for denunciations of the papacy. Such attacks clearly are intrinsic to his writings; their proliferation demands that they be regarded as more than merely ancillary or peripheral to the authorial schema. Nonetheless, there is an undeniably trenchant aspect to his criticisms. This alerts us to the strong possibility of commercial considerations, in an early modern print marketplace supporting the

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<sup>30</sup> For the early modern Protestant accent on access to the word, see *Religion in History: Conflict, Conversion and Coexistence*, ed. J. Wolfe (Manchester: 2004) 79.

<sup>31</sup> A stance Baxter was to adopt. See *ODNB*.



production and purchase of countless homiletic, expository, devotional and controversial writings.<sup>32</sup>

### *Repentance and agency*

In both works, repentance continues to be accounted a crucial stage of conversion. Smith sets out his position in the opening line of *The Admirable Convert*:

Of all Doctrines to be preached, none [is] more necessarie then the Doctrine of true *Repentance*, which as it is most necessarie to life and salvation, as our Saviour witnesseth [...]. So never more neglected, then in these times, wherein too many of Israels *Watchmen* bend themselves, not to the edification of the faith of the Church, as to disturbe the peace thereof (2).

The fate of the impenitent thief stands as a minatory example of man's embodiment of sin and shame. God 'hath joined these two together [...] and will in this example teach all men unto the end of the world, That *Sinne* and *shame* are companions, and go not farre asunder' (41). Just as it is the behaviour of the convert which marks him out, so it is the behaviour of this thief which betrays his impenitence: 'He railed on Christ', and is therefore 'so farre from being humbled in the sense of his sinne' (50). Crucially, however, man on his own cannot escape sin; as 'admirable' as the converted thief is, God's grace remains the key agent of change in him:

But whence was this, that he is become such as worthy confessor, excusing Christ, and pleading his cause, who lately before by his sinfull and wretched life, had so dishonoured him? No question this proceeded from the Lords free grace and mercy shewed unto him, giving him to see his sins, to be humbled for the same, and by a lively faith to lay hold on Christ (152).

There is no divergence between fallen mankind 'until the Lord make the difference by grace' (153), Smith insists, and 'wee shall find the whole worke of grace, of Conversion, and salvation, to be wholly attributed unto him' (156). Smith augments the notion of God's sole agency with

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<sup>32</sup> Questier, among other scholars, has observed that 'the theological doctrines in the [conversion] tracts were politicised and thus attracted the attention of people who otherwise might have been little interested by them'; Questier, *Conversion* 14.

a Calvinist assertion of the doctrine of unconditional predestination.<sup>33</sup> He avers that 'from him alone proceedeth what will, what power, or abilitie soever we have, for any holy duty' (157). In the figure of the penitent thief the reader will readily see that the 'happie fruit of sanctified afflictions... had humbled him, and make him walk more awfully towards God' (165).

Importantly, the issue of divine agency impacts not only on the thief's own conversion, but also on his subsequent attempt to convert the impenitent thief. This attempt is extrapolated from Luke 23. 40: 'He rebuked him'. Smith thus draws attention to the perpetual issue of 'the apostolic impulse'.<sup>34</sup> Smith contends that this act of 'reprehension' is 'a fruit of his conversion', since 'it is a true note of a true convert to stop others in a course of sinne' (191). Such admonishment is 'a pretious balme that shall not breake their heads' (211). And in this respect the conversionary imperative of the penitent thief is held to be blessed with felicitous timing, for an *in extremis* time of crisis provides suitable (if not always fertile) grounds for conversion: 'Now this impenitent Thief was a dying, this was a fit time for his fellow to reprove him' (205). Here, Smith shows his sensitivity to the specific – and sometimes unique – conditions in which conversion, and attempts at conversion, can take place. And in this way he demonstrates his antipathy toward any arbitrary transferability of the thief's circumstances to those of his readers.<sup>35</sup>

Throughout these works, we witness a perforce subtle balancing act between two potentially competing factors: the exclusivity of God's grace as the catalyst of conversion, and mankind's role as an agent of it. In *The Ethiopian Eunuchs Conversion*, God's use of man is emphasised in this way:

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<sup>33</sup> An implicitly anti-Arminian stance which suggests that by 1632 religious press censorship in England was not as tightly controlled as some have argued. For a lucid discussion of which, see the introduction in Mutchow Towers S., *Control of Religious Printing in Early Stuart England* (Woodbridge: 2003). More recently still, Randy Robertson has noted that 'In theory, the regulations [of the Caroline regime] were watertight; in practice, however, much slipped through the sieve': Robertson R., *Censorship and Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England: the Subtle Art of Division* (University Park, Pennsylvania: 2009) 31.

<sup>34</sup> Fletcher R., *The Conversion of Europe: from Paganism to Christianity 371–1386 AD* (London: 1998) 6.

<sup>35</sup> For a modern ethnographic account of the role of crisis in conversion, see Rambo L.R., *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: 1993) 166.

When the Lord sent the Angel here unto Philip, hee could, if it had pleased him, have sent the same unto the Eunuch, but the Lord will have his word rather dispenced by earthly and sinfull men, then by celestial and heavenly Angels (27).

‘And thus in all the ages’, Smith continues, ‘the Lord hath ever stirred up such instruments for the enlarging of his kingdome; who, as Saint James speaketh of Elias, are subject unto the same infirmities that other men are’ (28). It is a line of argument consonant with the weighty, though not decisive, role of ministers in the conversion process which we see throughout both narratives. As such, it veers towards Baxter’s theology, which embraced the notion of human cooperation with grace.<sup>36</sup> However, it falls short of replicating Baxter’s controversial retreat from predestinarian orthodoxy.<sup>37</sup>

The emphasis placed on the Ethiopian’s reading of Scripture has been noted. However, linked with this same issue of human agency, Smith is chary of giving the impression that such reading in and of itself can effect conversion. Rather, reading provides the necessary spiritual guidance and conditions the human heart needs to receive God’s grace:

Though the reading of the Scriptures doe not ordinarily worke faith and repentance, yet it is an excellent meanes to prepare the heart for the same worke, and to confirme our faith, to strengthen it, and to build up a man more and more in the knowledge of Christ (135).

It is not designed to be an easily acquired skill: the Ethiopian’s evident and humbly acknowledged lack of comprehension of the Book of Isaiah highlights the ‘hard and difficult’ (146) nature of scripture.<sup>38</sup> Philip – and by extension ministers of the word – can offer illumination, yet even where grace has initially brought about conversion, vigilance and

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<sup>36</sup> As Kevin Sharpe has commented, ‘The logic of strict predestination did not square easily with the vocation of a preaching ministry’; Sharpe K., *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven – London: 1992) 299.

<sup>37</sup> As evidenced in *Aphorisms of Justification* (1649). Smith’s copious concern for pastoral ideals foregrounds, in turn, Baxter’s *Gildas Salvanus: the Reformed Pastor* (London, Robert White: 1656).

<sup>38</sup> Modern critical commentaries continue to emphasise the importance of the eunuch’s ‘sense of his need of assistance’, and his sincere ‘reaching out for something more than he had ever known before’, for his impending conversion; *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the whole Bible, in one volume, Genesis to Revelation*, ed. L.F. Church (London: 1960) 465; *The Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. G.A. Buttrick and others, 12 vols. (Nashville, TN: 1953) ix, 114.

diligence remain urgently required on both sides. With recidivism an ever-present threat, and Calvinist modes of self-examination still to the fore, sure signs of a sincere conversion continue to be scrutinised by Smith. The surest sign is produced by 'true grace', and is built on the foundation of Acts 8. 37 – 'if thou beleevest with al thy heart' (450). Smith claims that the true convert should desire to 'labour more and more for the confirmation and increase of the same grace, with this Eunuch here, and so be led forward daily towards perfection' (455).

It is here that the accretive rather than instantaneous nature of conversion is most stridently posited. As we saw above in his dedication to Greeves in *The Admirable Convert*, Smith sees conversion not as a single, life-changing experience but as a continuing process or spiritual journey. Again, it is a thoroughly Reformed stance: conversion always has to be renewed, since there is always the danger of regression. Like Baxter, then, Smith disapproves of contemporary expository works which emphasise the need for a profound and immediate conversion experience.<sup>39</sup> He argues instead that we shall know if we have been genuinely converted, if we have 'truly put on Christ with all the graces of his Spirit [...] by our daily growth and increase in grace and godlinesse. True grace will certainly increase' (455). And as is his custom, Smith persuasively divides a key term, in this case 'the means for the growth and increase of grace' (456), into a list of component parts, including meditation, prayer and thanksgiving. It is the last of these – based on Acts 23. 39: 'And hee went on his way rejoycing' (514) – which is the focus of special attention. In 'every soule where true conversion & saving Faith is wrought', Smith claims, 'this inward joy and consolation, in some measure or other, at some time or other is wrought' (516).

### Conclusion

In conclusion, *The Admirable Convert* and *The Ethiopian Eunuchs Conversion* provide useful insights into early modern conversion narratives. Above all, Smith is preoccupied with the question of agency. He stresses in both works that ultimately only God is able to convert fallen human beings, and if there is a single governing thesis in both

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<sup>39</sup> See, notably, Baxter's *The Right Method for a Settled Peace of Conscience* (1653).

works it is this. Yet he also reserves room for (Puritan) clergy in facilitating conversion through their sermons and pastoral work. Indeed, the role of the minister is of great importance: he imparts the requisite knowledge of the word and hence pre-prepares the object of that grace. He also has a key subsequent role in strengthening the convert. Indeed, the spectre of backsliding, and the convert's continual need for the sustenance provided by grace, necessitates an ongoing didactic role for ministers of the word (and authors), in what is a lifelong process of conversion rather than a one-off event. In this way, Smith's conversion narratives do not so much provide models for converts themselves as for their converters. Both books posit the efficacy of positive and negative exemplification, though both also recognise the limitations – in terms of emulation – of examples which are provided by God only on 'speciall occasions'. The genuineness of conversion is another constant concern. It can reliably be tested by its fruits, notably the desire and empathy to convert others which will indubitably be shown by true converts. Finally, the author's ostensible fastening on specific New Testament events invariably catalyses contemporary factional assaults on Catholicism and, in a more specifically British context, Laudianism. In this and other literary genres, such attacks were to contribute meaningfully toward the causes of the looming English Civil Wars.

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## CONVERTING ENGLAND: MYSTICISM, NATIONALISM, AND SYMBOLISM IN THE POETRY OF JOHN DONNE

Jayme M. Yeo

The word 'conversion', especially in literary studies, almost uniformly signals an internal choice, a drama that, although staged against the backdrop of political and theological change, is played out largely in the realm of the individual.<sup>1</sup> In fact, a number of recent studies have investigated the drama of conversion vis-à-vis the actual dramas of the day – Philip Massinger's *The Renegado*, William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, and Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*, to name a few.<sup>2</sup> While the conversions in these plays take place in the midst of social and political upheaval imagined on the grand scale, the actual moment of change tends to be focused on by critics as a deeply internalized act. For instance, Daniel Vitkus, while recognizing that Tamburlaine's unstable religious identity is underwritten by contemporary anxieties about divine authority, ultimately perceives Tamburlaine's rejection of God as a matter of private ambition, what contemporaries would call an 'infirmity of faith'.<sup>3</sup>

However inseparable conversion may be from individual experience, the early modern interrelationship of microcosm and macrocosm, of person and society, ensured that the word 'conversion' also applied at the national level. As John Donne notes, 'that which is proverbially

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<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to Edward Snow and Joseph Campana for their invaluable insight. Thanks also to Helen C. Wilcox for reminding me of the importance of conversion in Donne's personal life.

<sup>2</sup> As the names of these plays suggest, most of these works concentrate on contact between Europe and the Ottoman Empire. See Vitkus D.J., *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570–1630* (New York: 2003) 1–44; Raman S., *Framing 'India': The Colonial Imaginary in Early Modern Culture* (Stanford: 2002); Barbour R., *Before Orientalism: London's Theatre of the East, 1576–1626* (Cambridge: 2003); Matar N., *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: 1999); and Jowitt C. (ed.), *Pirates? The Politics of Plunder, 1550–1650* (New York: 2007). In poetry, critical work on conversion tends to focus on the personal experiences of particular authors such as Richard Crashaw. See Murray M., *The Poetics of Conversion in Early Modern English Literature: Verse and Change from Donne to Dryden* (Cambridge: 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Vitkus, *Turning Turk* 51.

said of particular Bodies, will hold in a Body Politick'.<sup>4</sup> The conversion of early modern England, from Catholicism to Anglican Protestantism, can therefore be understood and analyzed as a national event as much as a collection of individual ones. In some respects, of course, this national event was the result of the only individual conversion that actually mattered: the conversion of the monarch. But if, at the official level, Henry VIII's self-proclaimed title of 'supreme head of the Church of England' changed the religious identity of an entire nation seemingly overnight, at the level of the populace, England's conversion was still largely a fiction of the state; national conversion was a Protestant idea and ideal that helped navigate the state through the very real instabilities of the Reformation. As Christopher Haigh writes, the English Reformation produced a 'Protestant nation, but not a nation of Protestants'.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, as revisionist historians such as Haigh have shown, the achievements of the English Reformation were constantly troubled by sectarianism and the presence of recusant culture even, as Molly Murray notes, 'after England's official Reformation would seem to have been definitely achieved'.<sup>6</sup> In the face of such religious disorder, the idea of national conversion provided a fantasy of unity. Although the English Reformation may have been interrupted and usurped by papists and internal divisions, the hopes of the official Protestant state (when it *was* officially Protestant, that is) remained pinned inexorably on what Ethan Shagan has called 'the phantasmagoric goal of "national conversion"'.<sup>7</sup>

In order to authorize this idea of national conversion, England required a 'conversion' of another kind; the ideological structures that had their roots in Catholic traditions had to be adapted to a Protestant worldview. This need created a symbolic campaign to rehabilitate the

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<sup>4</sup> John Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. G.R. Potter – E.M. Simpson, 10 vols. (Berkeley: 1953–1962) vol. 4, 140.

<sup>5</sup> Haigh C., *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: 1993) 281.

<sup>6</sup> Murray, *Poetics of Conversion* 18. See also Scarisbrick J.J., *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford: 1984); Duffy E., *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (New Haven: 1992). For a concise historiography of the Reformation and a compelling 'post-revisionist' historical alternative, see Shagan E.H., *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Shagan, *Popular Politics* 7. For Shagan, historians ought to reject the assumption that any nation is capable of 'converting' in this sense. However, this article holds that the fantasy of 'national conversion' still bears investigation as a compelling idea for early modern peoples.

images and texts that had traditionally upheld Catholicism and adapt them to a newly-Protestant England.<sup>8</sup> It is perhaps no coincidence that the most famous example of this pilfering from Catholic rhetoric – the transformation of Elizabeth I into the Virgin Queen – occurred during the reign that did the most to solidify the Protestant identity of the nation. Imaginative literature provided a space in which to translate the philosophies of Protestant apologetics and polemics into affective language, allowing people to connect on an emotional, intuitive level with the idea of a nation whose formerly Catholic practices and symbols now had Protestant valences. This article examines how the work of one seventeenth century author, John Donne, carried on this project begun in the sixteenth century, instilling Catholic symbolism with Protestant meaning as a way of imagining England's conversion on the large scale.

In the years of the late Elizabethan and early Stuart reigns, the task of instilling Catholic symbols with Protestant meaning was complicated by the traumatic effects of colonization; a changing world meant that many of the ideas that had traditionally underwritten Catholic symbolism were destabilized.<sup>9</sup> The rapidly expanding geography of the world, coupled with burgeoning capitalism, particularly affected two objects with symbolic weight that had used religious imagery to underwrite the authority of Catholic nations: maps and coins. The renowned T-O maps had for centuries depicted the relationship of the world's continents centered on the holy cities of Rome or Jerusalem, while coins typically encoded the figure or heraldry of the prince together with images of crosses or angels. By the seventeenth century, however, the settlement of new lands and the consequent imperatives of geographically accurate navigation increasingly made the conceptual cartography of the T-O maps seem outmoded. Similarly, the debasement of monies in early modern Europe as the result of an influx of New World bullion had, by the seventeenth century, undercut the stability not only of the monetary value of coins, but also of the symbolic value that was supposed to be analogous to it. And so, while the

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<sup>8</sup> For a more general discussion on the relationship of art to Reformation ideology, see Sharpe K., *Remapping Early Modern England: The Culture of Seventeenth-Century Politics* (Cambridge: 2000) 75.

<sup>9</sup> To some extent, this symbolic rupture was as much the fault of court culture as political upheaval. See Sharpe, *Remapping Early Modern England* 34–36. It is also worth noting that the addition of Scotland to Britain in 1603 may have further destabilized national identity.

official English stance asserted the *fait accompli* of England's conversion to Protestantism under the auspices of the monarchical head of church and state, the symbols that might have been marshaled to lend weight to those assertions were rapidly becoming obsolete in the face of a changing world.

Donne's poetry rescues maps and coins from this defunct geographic and economic context, giving them a new artistic framework that ultimately resurrects them as icons of a unified Protestant nationality. To accomplish this poetic feat, Donne's work turns to the mystical union described in the writings of such Catholic theologians as St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Teresa of Ávila in order to reinvigorate maps and coins with spiritual meaning. Specifically, maps and coins become metaphors that convey union on a mass scale in order to imagine not the mystical interior conversion of the Catholic soul toward God, but the communal conversion of a Protestant nation.

This essay will investigate three of Donne's poems to discover how each highlights a different aspect of this symbolic project. "A Valediction of Weeping" reveals the centrality of mystical union in reimagining these crumbling representations of the nation; it utilizes coins not as problematic symbols of economic prosperity, but as tools that enable union between lovers. "The Bracelet" highlights nationalism by using Catholic symbols within Protestant patriotism; it focuses on Michael the Archangel, an image that English coinage inherited from Catholic iconography, as the ideal figure for the Protestant nation. And finally, "Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness" expresses the hope that the religious and national cohesion of England might one day extend to the world at large; the poem overlaps images drawn from the Catholic T-O maps with newer, more geographically accurate references to imagine a union between God and the world that goes beyond doctrinal boundaries.

In relying on mystical union to underwrite the meaning of these metaphors, Donne's poetry attempts to clear away the complications of outer colonial turmoil and, in doing so, creates a symbolism that transcends inner politico-religious division. Even though the New World discoveries led to destabilization or debasement in the political sphere, in Donne's poems, these new lands and resources lead to union with a God that mimics their expansiveness. This fact relocates the symbolic meaning of coins and maps, not within the problematic realities of expansion, but within spiritual union. St. Teresa points out that this turning away from the temporal world is one of the hallmarks

of the Prayer of Union: 'we are all asleep, and fast asleep, to the things of the world, and to ourselves [...] as someone who has completely died to the world in order to live more fully in God'.<sup>10</sup> That is, an awareness of God supersedes any problems that might arise within the material world. Consequently, the nation that these maps and coins symbolize is founded on an immeasurable God capable of unifying England beyond the deleterious effects of popish partisanship and schismatic sects. Unified to a God beyond doctrinal disputes, Donne's poetry imagines an England unified to itself.

For over a century, critics have been aware of Donne's familiarity with Spanish theology; one of Donne's earliest biographers, Edmund Gosse, cites Donne himself, who confessed to having more works by Spanish authors in his personal library than from any other country.<sup>11</sup> However, while the influence of Spanish mysticism has long been a focus for Donne studies, criticism has largely ignored the political context of that influence. Donne's own conversion from Catholicism to English Protestantism has, understandably, tended to deflect critical thinking toward questions of Donne's own individual religious identity and away from his poetry's engagement with conversion. The central question of critical work tends toward the biographical – whether Donne was truly Protestant or secretly Catholic – to create what one critic has termed the 'confessionally based rift' of Donne studies.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Teresa of Ávila, *Castillo Interior o Las Moradas y Exclamaciones del Alma a Dios y Poesias* (Madrid: 1965) 115–116: 'con estar todas dormidas, y bien dormidas, a las cosas del mundo y a nosotras mismas [...] como quien de todo punto ha muerto al mundo para vivir más en Dios'.

<sup>11</sup> Gosse E., *The Life and Letters of John Donne*, 2 vols. (New York – London: 1899) 2:176–177. See also Thompson E.N.S., "Mysticism in Seventeenth-Century English Literature", *Studies in Philology* 18, 2 (1921) 170–231; and Brown H.J., "'The Soul's Language Understood': John Donne and the Spanish Mystics", *Q/W/E/R/T/Y: arts, littératures & civilisations du monde anglophone* 11 (2001) 27–35. For an early argument against Donne's Spanish influence, see Simpson E.M., "Donne's Spanish Authors", *Modern Language Review* 42 (1948) 182–185.

<sup>12</sup> Whalen R., *The Poetry of Immanence: Sacrament in Donne and Herbert* (Toronto: 2002) xiii. For Donne's Catholic, continental influences, see Martz L.L., *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven – London: 1954); Flynn D., *John Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility* (Bloomington – Indianapolis: 1995); and Young R.V., *Doctrine and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Poetry: Studies in Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, and Vaughan* (Cambridge: 2000). For arguments in favor of Donne's Protestantism, see Lewalski B.K., *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: 1979); Strier R., *Love Known: Theology and Experience in George Herbert's Poetry* (Chicago: 1983); and Papazian M.A. (ed.), *John Donne and the Protestant Reformation: New Perspectives*

In fact, Donne's own family was deeply invested in questions of conversion. Donne's grandfather, John Heywood, was involved in a 1542 plot against Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and eventually sought asylum abroad rather than convert to Protestantism. Donne's great-uncle, Thomas Heywood, was executed for Jesuitism in 1574, and Donne's maternal uncle, Jasper Heywood, headed a Jesuit mission in England before his capture in 1583. He was condemned for high treason and sentenced to be hanged, drawn, and quartered, although the sentence was later commuted to exile. There is convincing evidence that the twelve-year-old Donne visited Jasper during his imprisonment. Even Donne's own brother, Henry, was imprisoned in 1593 for harboring a priest, and died in Newgate before his trial.<sup>13</sup> Donne was therefore highly aware of the political ramifications that accompanied conversion, or the refusal to convert.

As John Carey points out, this family tradition of fierce loyalty to Rome contrasts greatly with Donne's decision to join the Anglican Church. Carey notes that having to face the terrifying possibility of his own damnation as he contemplated apostasy would prompt Donne later to embrace a model of the True Church that was more inclusive.<sup>14</sup> Donne's family history of religious persecution, coupled with the personal spiritual trauma of his own conversion, would eventually lead him to embrace a soteriology that ensured all truly 'faithful souls be alike glorified' independent of church affiliation.<sup>15</sup>

In Donne's *Songs and Sonnets*, however, these political and religious interests remain largely obscured behind the more immediate poetic project – to establish union between lovers. The metaphysical (and, just as often, physical) union in these poems is frequently consummated by means of a proxy, a metaphor that both symbolizes and enables it. In the case of "A Valediction of Weeping", union is authorized by the tears of the lover, who is about to embark upon a long journey. As

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(Detroit: 2003). For a recent alternative to this dichotomy, see Roston M., "Donne and the Meditative Tradition", *Religion and Literature* 37, 1 (2005) 45–68.

<sup>13</sup> On this family history, see Bald R.C., *John Donne: A Life* (New York: 1970) 25–26, 39–45; Carey J., *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (New York: 1981) 20–25; and Stubbs J., *John Donne: The Reformed Soul* (New York – London: 2007) 10–20, 43–46.

<sup>14</sup> Carey, *Life, Mind and Art* 15–36.

<sup>15</sup> Holy Sonnet 16, "If faithful souls", line 1; all subsequent references to John Donne's poetry will appear parenthetically in the text by line number and are from Donne, *John Donne's Poetry*, ed. D.R. Dickson (New York: 2007). See also Carey, *Life, Mind and Art* 28.

the lover stands before his beloved, her image is reflected in his tears, striking a coin that blends their individual identities into one object. Consequently, the coins of this poem are valued not monetarily but by their ability to bring two people together.

Donne's poetic conceit of loving union struggles to rise above the realities of individuality and separateness that the speaker experiences. In doing so, the poem simultaneously alludes to a contemporary challenge in seventeenth century economics: the problem of reconciling two separate and often incompatible systems of valuing coins. As a result of Tudor economic policies during the sixteenth century, the intrinsic value of coins was intermittently divorced from their face value, a fact that destabilized monetary value in general throughout the period. Previous centuries had valued coins by the precious metal they contained,<sup>16</sup> and England during these late medieval years maintained what economic historian C.E. Challis calls 'one of the finest gold currencies anywhere in Europe'.<sup>17</sup> English coins preserved a remarkably stable gold standard of 23 carats and 3½ grains, known as 'angel gold'.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the sixteenth century, however, this 'old right standard' suffered from periods of debasement, including most notably the Great Debasement of 1544–1551. During this time, the purity of coinage dropped to as low as 20 carats, even though coins minted at this lower standard were supposed to maintain the same face value of the finer coins that were already in circulation.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, increasing amounts of precious metals from the Americas destabilized the commodity price of bullion, making it even more difficult to link face value and intrinsic value.<sup>20</sup> As Charles P. Kindleberger notes, 'Even without the extended wars and the malversation

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<sup>16</sup> Miskimin H.A., *The Economy of Later Renaissance Europe, 1560–1600* (Cambridge: 1977) 155; Foucault M., *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: 1973) 176.

<sup>17</sup> Challis C.E., *The Tudor Coinage* (Manchester – New York: 1978) 257.

<sup>18</sup> Challis, *Tudor Coinage* 257, 303.

<sup>19</sup> Challis, *Tudor Coinage* 307. See also Idem, 81–112; Gould J.D., *The Great Debasement: Currency and the Economy in Mid-Tudor England* (Oxford: 1970); and Miskimin, *Later Renaissance Europe* 40–41, 155–162. Other instances of royal manipulation of currency included the issuance of dandyprats (1492–1525), Irish debasement (c. 1530–1543), English debasement (1542–1544), re-minting of base English coins to baser Irish coins (after 1551), and the issuance of rose nobles for circulation in the Netherlands (1584–1587). Challis, *Tudor Coinage* 52–54, 248–268.

<sup>20</sup> Challis, *Tudor Coinage* 183–198; Foucault, *Order of Things* 168–174. For a longer history of the commodity price of bullion in early modern Europe, see Miskimin, *Later Renaissance Europe* 28–43.

of mint masters and their higher authorities, getting the currency right in this period posed difficulties because of rapidly changing relative supplies of gold, silver, and copper and the opportunities this gave to exercise Gresham's Law'.<sup>21</sup>

As a result, the value of English money relied intermittently on the power of the monarch to set and enforce it.<sup>22</sup> Scipion de Grammont cogently noted this shift while it was occurring: '[m]oney does not draw its value from the material of which it is composed, but rather from its form, which is the image or mark of the Prince'.<sup>23</sup> Relying on a face value set by the monarch could be problematic, however, as merchants could not always be trusted to uphold face value, especially when it differed significantly from a coin's intrinsic value.<sup>24</sup>

In response to this economic upheaval, Donne's poem offers coinage an alternative image – the face of the beloved rather than the monarch – that realigns intrinsic and face value by signaling loving union rather than wealth.<sup>25</sup> The instable valuation of the economic arena thus finds the possibility of an imagined stability in the poetic domain as head of state morphs into head of beloved:

Let me pour forth  
My tears before thy face, whilst I stay here,  
For thy face coins them, and thy stamp they bear;  
And by this mintage they are something worth.  
(1–4)

The metaphor visually unites poet and beloved by combining the substance of the poet's tear with the reflection of the beloved to create a coin. In this sense, the intrinsic value of the coin (the tear) is derived entirely from its face value (the beloved); it is only by the 'face' or 'stamp' of the beloved that the coins might be considered 'something worth'. By making intrinsic value contingent on face value, the poem

<sup>21</sup> Kindleberger C.P., "The Economic Crisis of 1619 to 1923", *Journal of Economic History* 51, 1 (1991) 149–175, 151.

<sup>22</sup> Raman S., "Can't Buy Me Love: Money, Gender, and Colonialism in Donne's Erotic Verse", *Criticism* 43, 2 (2001) 135–168, 138.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Foucault, *Order of Things* 174–175.

<sup>24</sup> For an example of illegal currency trading during Irish debasement, see Challis, *Tudor Coinage* 268–274.

<sup>25</sup> On the relationship between intrinsic and face value in Donne's poetry, see Carey J., "Donne and Coins", in Carey J. (ed.), *English Renaissance Studies: Presented to Dame Helen Gardner in honour of her Seventieth Birthday* (Oxford: 1980) 151–163, 154.



reorganizes the unstable relationship that the two had in the economic arena.

The metaphor capitalizes on the divorce between intrinsic and face values by linking these values to lover and beloved, and then posing the possibility that value systems and people might both be realigned by love. As such, the ultimate value of the coin is predicated on love's ability to bring two people together. As John Carey notes, 'a coin, to Donne, was not an object but a relationship'.<sup>26</sup> The coin in this poem makes it possible for both beloved and lover to step outside of their separate identities and to become blended together in one image.

By becoming metaphors that enable union, coins in "Of Weeping" approximate the function of meditative images in contemporary mystical treatises. Louis L. Martz notes that the union between God and man imagined by contemporary mystics was often inaugurated by, as Francis de Sales notes, 'some similitude, answerable to the matter' of the day's meditation.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Ignatius of Loyola's famous 'composition of place', to which we will return, urges practitioners to begin their meditation with a visualization.<sup>28</sup> Mystical devotions incorporate these symbols in order to encourage the soul's transformation by emotionally and visually identifying with God. While "Of Weeping" has none of the overt theology of mystical treatises, it nevertheless uses the meditative images of mystical union as kind of template for imagining the union of lovers. Thus, the union forged in Donne's poem reiterates the emotional progression of a mystical conversionary experience: the soul identifies with an intermediary image that represents the complete union between self and God (in the case of mysticism) or between lovers (in the case of Donne's poem). In doing so, the poem seeks to find a language in which to overcome the problems of individuality and separation, to imagine the possibility of a continual internal conversion away from a solitary identity and toward community.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Carey, "Donne and Coins" 154.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Martz, *Poetry of Meditation* 28.

<sup>28</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *Autobiographia y Ejercicios Espirituales* (Madrid: 1966) 182–183: 'composición viendo el lugar'.

<sup>29</sup> Of course, "The Ecstasy" is the poem where this mystical union is most fully achieved in *Songs and Sonnets*. See Hughes M.Y., "Some of Donne's 'Ecstasies'", *PMLA* 75, 5 (1960) 509–518; and Schwartz R.M., *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World* (Stanford: 2008) 87–116. In a later sermon, Donne would use coins more explicitly to imagine the union of God and humanity: 'And then it [repayment of sin's debt] was lent in such money as was coyned even with the Image of God; man was made according to his Image: That Image being defaced, in a new Mint,

Donne's poetry is infamously self-destructive, with metaphors that can rarely maintain the conceptual challenges set before them. In keeping with this poetic tradition, the final stanzas in "Of Weeping" witness the gradual dissolution of that union so carefully constructed in the poem's opening. Ultimately the lovers' community can only last as long as their tears do. In an attempt to keep this future destruction at bay, the poem's second stanza reaches beyond itself to find a metaphor large and permanent enough to maintain the union symbolized in those tears. It is not enough that the lovers be unified in a coin; there must also be a world for them to circulate in:

On a round ball  
A workman, that hath copies by can lay  
An Europe, Afric, and an Asia,  
And quickly make that which was nothing *All*;  
So doth each tear,  
Which thee doth wear,  
A globe, yea world, by that impression grow.  
(10–16)

Whereas the first stanza of the poem concerns itself primarily with symbolic value, this second stanza struggles to find a place to suit the significance of those priceless coins. As if the image of the beloved on the tears were not enough to generate intrinsic value for the metaphor, the images of these lines reach out to a world beyond themselves, to an '*All*' that might match the value of the coin. As the images move from coins to continents, globes, and worlds, they create a metaphoric stockpile that ultimately dismantles the symbolic apparatus entirely. The pileup of discarded metaphors finally topples into itself. The tears of the beloved mix with the tears of the lover, drowning any possibilities for union that the poem once held: 'thy tears mix'd with mine do overflow | This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so' (17–18).

Although "Of Weeping" employs coins as meditative images that reach toward mystical union, its symbols ultimately fail. This poetic collapse is due to the lack of a metaphor expansive enough to support its own symbolic weight. Tears and coins, for all their value, are insufficient to signify union on the scale that Donne imagines it. The

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in the wombe of the Blessed Virgin, there was new money coyned; the Image of the invisible God, the second person in the trinity, was imprinted into the human nature'. Donne, *Sermons* vol. 4, 288. See also Carey, "Donne and Coins" 156–157.

tantalizing possibility offered by the poem, however – the promise that two people might inhabit the same spiritual space – keeps Donne's early poems formulating and reformulating the religious valences of these patriotic metaphors.

"The Bracelet" avoids the metaphoric lack that undoes "Of Weeping" through a central image that is both nationalistic and religious.<sup>30</sup> The poem is a versified plea made by a young rascal on behalf of his 'gold angel' coins, so called because they featured a representation of Michael the Archangel on their obverse. The angel is depicted on the coin defeating a serpent, an attribute inherited from Catholic iconography.<sup>31</sup> Hoping to avoid sacrificing these 'righteous angels' to his mistress as reimbursement for losing her bracelet, the unfortunate speaker futilely lobbies that they be spared 'the bitter cost' of being illegally alloyed with 'vile solder' to create a replacement chain (8–10).

The poem's central desire – to prevent its coins from being alloyed and reforged – manifests residual anxiety over Henrician debasement and changing bullion supplies.<sup>32</sup> In response, it links the supposed purity of the English coins to religious homogeneity. The speaker asserts that his coins, in their pure form, are Protestant symbols of a nation united to God, imagining an England in which uncorrupted coinage is the physical witness to a unified Protestantism. Unlike the coin-tears in "Of Weeping", which create a private union between lovers, the coins in "The Bracelet" symbolize a national community. The speaker thus appeals not to his beloved's compassion, but to her patriotism as he attempts to spare the coins – and the nation – from metaphoric doom.

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<sup>30</sup> Chronologically, most editors believe "The Bracelet" (before c. 1598) was probably written before "Of Weeping" (after c. 1602). I have analyzed "Of Weeping" first, however, in order to foreground Donne's idea of loving union. For the date of "The Bracelet", see John Donne, *The Elegies*, vol. 2 of John Donne, *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, ed. G.A. Stringer, 8 vols. (Bloomington – Indianapolis: 1995–) 513–514. For "Of Weeping", see John Donne, *The Complete Poetry of John Donne* ed. J.T. Shawcross (New York – London: 1968) 413; John Donne, *The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets* ed. H. Gardner (Oxford: 1965) xxv; and John Donne, *The Poems of John Donne*, ed. R. Robbins, 2 vols. (Harlow – London – New York: 2008) vol. 1, 273, 268–269. For "Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness" (c. 1623 or c. 1631), see Sparrow J., "On the Date of Donne's 'Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness'", *Modern Language Review* 19, 4 (1924) 462–466; and Donald R. Dickson's note in Donne, *John Donne's Poetry* 155n5.

<sup>31</sup> Challis, *Tudor Coinage* 167. See also Rev. 12:7–9.

<sup>32</sup> See Helen Gardner's unnumbered note in Donne, *The Elegies and the Songs and Sonnets* 113n.

The poem's opening brings economics and religion together by using religious language to underwrite the value of the gold angel coins. Specifically, the poem unites the social signs of wealth with the reconciliatory justice of the resurrection, torturously backloading the central metaphor with spiritual meaning:

Angels, which heaven commanded to provide  
 All things to me, and be my faithful guide;  
 To gain new friends, t'appease great enemies;  
 To comfort my soul, when I lie or rise.  
 Shall these twelve innocents, by thy severe  
 Sentence, dread Judge, my sin's great burden bear?  
 Shall they be damn'd and in the furnace thrown,  
 And punish'd for offences, not their own?  
 They save not me, they do not ease my pains,  
 When in that hell they're burnt and tied in chains.  
 (13–22)

Through a backward and implicit logic, the poem retroactively establishes the spiritual value of social climbing by mourning the loss of the coins as a lost salvation. The sacrifice of the innocent Christ, the poem asserts, was intended for the reconciliation of man and God. Far from reenacting that drama of reunion, however, the death of the coins abolish any metaphysical value they might have, for the sacrifice of the 'twelve innocents', doomed to bear the 'great burden' of 'offences not their own' fails to convey grace. In fact, grace relocates itself in the passage to the site of social ambition; the poem suggests that the speaker's easy passage through society, enabled by the coins, serves a soteriological function. This ability to save, however, is lost as the coins are consumed by fire.

The religious value of the coins relies on maintaining their intrinsic value – their economic purity. As the poem progresses, it expounds upon this contingent relationship between economic and religious purity by comparing the value of uncontaminated English coinage to that of other, less God-fearing nations:

Were they but crowns of France, I cared not,  
 For most of them, their natural country rot,  
 I think, possesseth; they come here to us  
 So lean, so pale, so lame, so ruinous.  
 And howsoe'er French kings most Christian be,  
 Their crownes are circumcis'd most Jewishly.  
 Or were they Spanish stamps, still travailing,  
 That are become as catholic as their king.  
 (23–30)

The passage denounces the economic, national, and religious impurity of those foreign moneys, with their debased fineness and Jewish/Catholic influences. The corruption of these continental coins contrasts with the spiritual integrity of the English angels, still in 'the first state of their creation' (12). The suggestion is that debasement itself reflects a spiritual degeneration that occurs on the national level. The sexual pun on the 'French disease', connoted by France's 'natural country rot' (sometimes spelled 'cuntry rott') underscores the infectious threat that the Catholic continent posed to Protestant England.<sup>33</sup> The passage displays the continental perversions of economics and religion as a warning to both the beloved and to England as a whole; in order to avoid falling into the trap of economic or religious disintegration, it is vital that the coins and the nation both maintain their integrity.

The poem fantasizes about religious homogenization as an extension of economic standardization; the purity of the gold angels constitutes a kind of metaphoric talisman against the degenerative influence of continental Europe. If, in reality, both Protestantism and economics in England were tarnished by popery, sectarianism, and the recent memory of debasement, in the poem at least, the speaker's gold angels represent the possibility of a 'pure' England, unified to itself and to God.

Although the poem fantasizes about a nation that has achieved an untarnished Protestant identity – a 'nation of Protestants', to repeat Haigh's words – it also manifests anxieties about the nation's ability to remain wholly Protestant. In answer to the mistress's assertions that the gold, although alloyed, would remain in the chain, Donne shifts his marker for religious value, from the intrinsic purity of the coins to their unblemished imprint, or form. He tells her that the loss of gold isn't the only tragedy for the coins, for 'form gives being, and their form is gone' (76).<sup>34</sup> In fact, the 'form' of the actual gold angel that the poem puns on also links nationalism to religion; while the obverse features Michael the Archangel, the reverse complements it with the image of a royal shield surmounted by a cross and superimposed over a traveling ship.<sup>35</sup> This arrangement of images on both surfaces of the coin bring religious and national emblems together, creating a patriotic icon that would, if not for the mistress's machinations, bolster the

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<sup>33</sup> See Gardner's unnumbered note in Donne, *The Elegies and the Songs and Sonnets* 114n; and John T. Shawcross's unnumbered note in Donne, *The Complete Poetry* 43n.

<sup>34</sup> Raman, "Can't Buy Me Love" 140.

<sup>35</sup> Challis, *Tudor Coinage* 167.

poem's central claims about the link between the nation's religious and economic purity. Instead, the speaker surrenders his coins to the mistresses, foreclosing the metaphor as a symbol of national unity and the coins lose any possibility they may have had for representing the union of God and nation.

As the inescapable fate of the coins closes in on them, their form, purity, and symbolism begin to shift, regressing rapidly from divine significance to more earthly imagery. The speaker, upon giving up his coins to his mistress, initially grieves in terms that profanely echo moments of the Passion. Bravely acquiescing to his mistress's demands, he announces, 'thy will be done' (79), a phrase that recalls not only the Lord's prayer, but also the words spoken by Christ in Gethsemane ('not what I will, but what thou wilt').<sup>36</sup> The speaker then takes on the mantle of Mary as he offers his coins up for sacrifice: 'with such anguish, as her only son | The mother in the hungry grave doth lay | Unto the fire these martyrs I betray' (80–82). Any image of the Pietà is fleeting, however, as maternal connotations morph into martyrdom. As the poem's conceits metamorphose in search of a spiritual significance that might continue to signify despite the destruction of the angels, the coins pass from divine sacrifice to martyrdom, from an iconic singularity to a debased plurality, from a visually unified image of salvation to a symbol of entrapment and display in the chain of the bracelet.<sup>37</sup>

In "The Bracelet" and "Of Weeping", the symbolic systems fail to uphold the weight of the union that they promise. As these poems reach out toward a space beyond coins, they find that the possibility of mystical union is a concept that is simply too big to be sustained. Rather than reject the metaphors of coins as 'too small' to hold the largeness of mystical union on a national level, however, Donne's later poetry simply enlarges the metaphor, ultimately finding that images of patriotic expansion are precisely the ones to convey the expansiveness of union with the divine, and, along the way, underwrite a nationalist religion.

<sup>36</sup> Mark 14:36.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Hughes and Roma Gill note the various religious roles played by these coins. See Hughes R.E., *The Progress of the Soul: The Interior Career of John Donne* (New York: 1968) 32; and Gill R., "Musa Iocosa Mea: Thoughts on the Elegies", in Smith A.J. (ed.), *John Donne: Essays in Celebration* (London: 1972) 47–72, 69.

"Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness" turns away from the coins and value systems of earlier poems and toward colonial cartography in order to create a metaphoric map that plots the course to mystical union. In doing so, the poem makes a concerted effort to negotiate a new global geography that threatened to undo the symbolic meaning of medieval T-O maps. The conventional account of early modern cartography holds that medieval *mappaemundi* supplied a conceptual, and often religious, representation of world geography.<sup>38</sup> Centered, as many of the *mappaemundi* were, on holy sites such as Jerusalem or Rome, such representations demonstrated both spatially and figuratively the religious origins of human history. By the early seventeenth century, however, such sacred valences were largely supplanted by a Ptolemaic emphasis on abstract space.<sup>39</sup> Although this change was based partially on cultural shifts, early modern global expansion played a large part in the shifting organization of cartographic space; with the advent of New World discoveries, it became necessary to depict geography with more spatial accuracy.<sup>40</sup> If these newer systems of mapping supplied cartographic solutions to the difficulties of early modern exploration, however, they also created a symbolic absence by their inability to visualize religion in relation to the actual geography of an exponentially expanding world. The Ptolemaic emphasis on abstract space, although suited to early modern expansion, foreclosed the religious conceptualizing of earlier maps. In much the same way that "Of Weeping" and "The Bracelet" deals with competing value systems in relation to coins, "Hymn to God, My God" takes advantage of this contemporary geographic confusion by rehearsing the break between conceptual and physical mapping and then reformulating a relationship between the two that uses the poet's own body as a map to mystical union.

Although the poem ostensibly muses on what the speaker believes to be his imminent death, the first part of the poem is much more

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<sup>38</sup> Morse V., "The Role of Maps in Later Medieval Society: Twelfth to Fourteenth Century", in Woodward D. (ed.), *The History of Cartography*, vol. 3 (Chicago – London: 1998) 25–52, 31.

<sup>39</sup> Woodward D., "Cartography and the Renaissance: Continuity and Change", in *History of Cartography* vol. 3, 3–24, 12.

<sup>40</sup> One of the most beneficial consequences of the Ptolemaic map was its ability to accommodate new discoveries. Since Ptolemaic maps were proportional, new lands could simply be added in without "stretching" or extending the map'. Woodward, "Cartography and the Renaissance" 13.

concerned with laying out the geography of the body-map than of dealing with the immediate terrors and uncertainties of the afterlife. The '*fretum februs*' of the poet's own body are, for him, less an indication of a physical state than a spiritual one (10). The 'physicians', transformed into '[c]osmographers' may be more interested in the '*februs*', the fever, that harkens the speaker's death; the speaker himself is drawn to the '*fetrum*', the straits, that his own body signifies (6-7). As the speaker meditates on the metaphoric and religious connections between his body-map, an actual world-map, and a promised resurrection, he turns increasingly to extra-cartographic references to help manage the symbolic meanings of the map, which would otherwise threaten to undo his soteriological hopes:

I joy, that in these straits, I see my West;  
 For, though their currents yield return to none,  
 What shall my West hurt me? As West and East  
     In all flat Maps (and I am one) are one,  
     So death doth touch the resurrection.  
 (11-15)

In order to read his own body, the poet must flatten the globe into a finite map, thereby superimposing an artificial beginning and end to the otherwise infinitely circular and repetitious sphere. Flattening an endless circuitry imposes meaning by physically locating the cardinal directions that, on the globe, are conceptual fantasies of place. There is no exact location for 'East' or 'West' on the globe, for both indicate directions of travel that exclude arrival. As Donne puts it in a sermon that is often cited to gloss this image: 'In a flat Map, there goes no more, to make West East, though they be distant in an extremity, but to paste that flat Map upon a round body, and then West and East are all one'.<sup>41</sup> Since east and west in the poem are conceptually 'off the map', they enable the speaker to imagine a hidden cycle of death and resurrection that lies waiting to be discovered outside of the artificially 'flattened' birth-death chronology of life. If east meets west somewhere beyond the flat map, so too does death meet rebirth somewhere outside of the physical boundaries of life.

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<sup>41</sup> Donne, *Sermons* vol. 6, 59. Quoted in Carey, *Life, Mind and Art* 264; Donne, *The Complete Poetry* 410n192; Sparrow, "On the Date" 463; Mueller J.M., "The Exegesis of Experience: Dean Donne's 'Devotions upon Emergent Occasions'", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 67, 1 (1968) 1-19, 14.



Before moving into the afterlife, however, the poet gets inexplicably caught up in the geography of his travel:

Is the Pacific Sea my home? Or are  
 The easterne riches? Is Jerusalem?  
 Anyan, and Magellan, and Gibraltar,  
 All straights, and none but straights, are ways to them,  
 Whether where Japhet dwelt, or Cham, or Sem.  
 (16–20)

The proliferating place-names of straits – Bering, Magellan, Gibraltar – reflect the proliferation of discoveries that had occurred in the previous century, along with the mounting symbolic confusion that they instantiated. The historical and moral imperatives of the medieval *mappaemundi*, the poem asserts, are unnatural representations of a real world marked by exponentially increasing places. Thus, while the first few lines of the poem attempt to create symbolic meaning out of the world map, the following lines undo that meaning when they begin to account for the new discoveries of early modern exploration. While, according to the symbolic meaning of the T-O maps, the speaker should be able to chart his course to heaven, the presence of these uncharted territories complicate his journey to the afterlife.

The poet finds resolution in the unification of Ptolemaic mapping and religious meaning, reified in the mystical overlap of Eden and Calvary, where it was supposed that ‘Christ’s Crosse, and Adam’s tree, stood in one place’ (23).<sup>42</sup> This image links together the lost land of Eden and the promised land of the New Jerusalem, finding a new location on the map to signal the cycle of death and redemption described in the opening lines. The passage thus recreates the relationship between a religious worldview and the map that helps to construct it; the burden of mapping is to enable mystical union rather than delineate space.

Ultimately, this new union enables the poet to imagine his own body as the location of resurrection, where the poet might ‘find both Adams met in me’ (23). The journey of the poem’s metaphor, from maps of space to metaphysical symbols to, finally, union with the divine, creates an understanding of an expanding world that was disallowed both by the religious perspectives of medieval *mappaemundi* and by the realities of a world engaged in a political struggle for land and power. “Hymn to God, My God” reads infant globalism as a possibility for

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<sup>42</sup> See Donne, *The Complete Poetry* 391n22.

mystical union; it imagines a world map as a symbol of rebirth that allows the speaker to attain union with the divine.

The specific reference to the union of humanity and divinity within the body imports mysticism into the poetic project. The poem utilizes mystical theology even more specifically, however, in its reference to the mapping of an imaginative place that metaphorically enables that union to occur; like the coins in “Of Weeping” and “The Bracelet”, maps in “Hymn to God, My God” function as meditative images that inaugurate union. Contemplative writings draw abundantly from images of place to enable union with God. Ignatius of Loyola enjoins his followers to visualize a mental landscape in preparation for meditation. In his recommendation for the ‘composition of place’, he entreats his readers ‘to see with the imagination the corporeal place where the thing is that we wish to contemplate [...] for example a temple or mountain, where Jesus Christ or Our Mother is’.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Teresa of Ávila’s ‘prayer of recollection’ also makes use of an imaginative place, though rather than a purposeful prelude to prayer, hers appears as a mystical gift provided to the contemplative that ‘makes one close one’s eyes and desire solitude, and without artifice, there gradually appears the building in which one can make the prayer already described’.<sup>44</sup> The point of the practice is to facilitate union by creating a symbolic topography that will provide a path to contemplation.

Like the map in “Hymn to God, My God”, this visualized place in mystical writings, while ostensibly an outer landscape or imaginative edifice, is always located within the body. In his description of the composition, for instance, Loyola calls for two different kinds of imaginative space-making, both of which are closely connected to images of embodiment. The first kind of visualization is a ‘lugar corpóreo’, literally translated, a corporeal place, a physical setting for meditating on visible things. The second, meant for contemplating conceptual things, is an imaginative scene that encapsulates the idea. In a meditation on sin, for instance, Loyola recommends that the practitioner imagine

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<sup>43</sup> Loyola, *Autobiographia* 183: ‘Ver con la vista de la imaginación el lugar corpóreo donde se halla la cosa que quiero contemplar [...] así como un templo o monte, donde se halla Jesucristo o Nuestra Señora’.

<sup>44</sup> Ávila, *Castillo Interior* 100: ‘Puesto que sin quererlo, se hace esto de cerrar los ojos y desear soledad, y sin artificio, parece que se va labrando el edificio para la oración que queda dicha’.

her soul 'imprisoned in her body', and her body amid the topography of a valley.<sup>45</sup>

For Donne's poem, that meditational topography stretches to include an entire world by rendering the globe a symbol of union with God. The merging of the poet's single, distinct identity with a collective world landscape metaphorically imagines an individual conversion that sustains, rather than problematizes, the idea of corporate conversion. As the individual turns to God, the lands on the map are themselves simultaneously transformed into a pictorial representation of that inner change. This individual conversion is an interior turning and a cyclic returning from physical death to spiritual birth, to a divine presence that has always resided within. That is to say, the poem's ideal religious experience moves away from maintaining strict institutional boundaries and toward a capacious religiosity, one that eschews the doctrinal debates in which the Christian church was embroiled. It surrenders strict classifications in favor of identifying with a God beyond boundaries.

Donne's poetry constructs an idea of conversion in which internal change brings the soul into alignment with a collective experience of 'one divine truth'.<sup>46</sup> Conversion is therefore registered less as a transfer of religious allegiance than as a reorienting of the self toward God. It is a moment in the process of repentance, a spiritual movement that, in the words of Murray, is always 'resolutely inward and upward [...] an interior journey to God made by every Christian soul'.<sup>47</sup> This interior journey leads the convert to union with God and, in doing so, to union with a nation that is itself undergoing the same transformative process. Donne's England turns from the Catholic Church not in order to embrace the dogmatic truthfulness of Protestantism so much as to realize its own spiritual regeneration; the English Reformation is simply one more page in the long narrative of the country's religious development.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Loyola, *Autobiographia* 184: 'La composición será ver con la vista imaginativa y considerar mi ánima ser encarcelada en este cuerpo corruptible y todo el compósito en este valle'.

<sup>46</sup> Sharpe, *Remapping Early Modern England* 48.

<sup>47</sup> Murray, *Poetics of Conversion* 12. Murray notes that this kind of conversion has its roots in medieval *conversio*, and was displaced by the early modern emphasis on institutionalism.

<sup>48</sup> Stubbs J., *John Donne: The Reformed Soul* (New York: 2006) 92, 378–397.

Maps and coins metaphorize this process, symbolizing a nation that might be capable of trading out its instable economics or obsolete cartography for a patriotism that has its roots in unification with God. These metaphors reject the limitedness of contemporary monetary value or geographic signification in order to inaugurate a mysticism that enables community. Maps and coins ultimately become the emblems of the nation's corporate conversion to a religion that moves beyond the boundaries of Reformation upheaval. Of course, this optimistic portrait of national unity is nothing more than a fantasy. Donne's poetry envisions an impossible conversion to a non-existent religion, to a Church of England that would be forever in the making. However, even while the realities of England's continued religious instability gave the lie to this pipe dream, Donne's poetry offers an imaginative alternative. In the face of actual religious turmoil, his symbolism finally reaches toward a whole church – a True Church – that might be truly embraced by all.

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CONVERSION IN JAMES SHIRLEY'S  
*ST PATRICK FOR IRELAND* (1640)

Alison Searle

In his play *St Patrick for Ireland* (published in 1640), the Caroline dramatist, James Shirley (1596–1666), represents the complex process of Ireland's conversion from paganism to Christianity.<sup>1</sup> There are two distinct reasons why *St Patrick for Ireland* is unique in Shirley's *oeuvre*: it was specifically written for his Irish audience at the Werburgh Street theatre, and it makes extensive use of spectacular stage effects (devils, serpents, fire and so on). It was produced while Shirley was in Dublin, under the rule of the English Deputy, Sir Thomas Wentworth. Shirley's own religious convictions are unclear: his biographer, Anthony Wood, claims that he converted (as an ordained clergyman) from the Church of England to Catholicism before he became a playwright.<sup>2</sup> This is largely unverified by biographical evidence to date, but it has had a profound impact on subsequent accounts of Shirley's life and works.<sup>3</sup> Shirley lived during a period of revolutionary religious change. He wrote plays and masques for Charles I and Henrietta Maria; he was principal dramatist at the Werburgh Street theatre in Dublin

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the anonymous peer-reviewer of this essay for suggestions that clarified the structure and presentation of the overall argument. I have also been helped by discussions with Eugene Giddens, Samantha Rayner, Justine Williams, Eva Griffith and Rowlie Wymer.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses* (London: Thomas Bennet, 1692) vol. 2, 260–261.

<sup>3</sup> Sandra Burner notes that James Shirley can probably be identified with the Jacobus Shirley listed in a Recusant Role (The National Archives E77/49); however, there is also a record of his assent to the Bill of Uniformity on 18 August, 1662: Burner, S., *James Shirley: A Study of Literary Coteries and Patronage in Seventeenth-Century England* (Lanham: 1998) 168, 194, 210. Rebecca Bailey has recently argued that Shirley's relationship with the court of Henrietta Maria in the late 1620s and early 1630s demonstrates strong Catholic affiliations; Bailey R., *Staging the Old Faith: Queen Henrietta Maria and the Theatre of Caroline England, 1625–1642* (Manchester: 2009). Eva Griffith re-examines the evidence of Shirley's recusancy provided by The National Archives E377/49, membrane 125 recto, in Griffith E., "Till the state fangs catch you. James Shirley the Catholic: Why it does not matter (and why it really does)", *The Times Literary Supplement*, 2 April 2010.

(1636–1640); he assisted William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, in his dramatic writing and probably fought under him for the King in the Civil War. He published several plays during the Interregnum and one of his masques was performed for the Portuguese ambassador to Oliver Cromwell's government; he died in the aftermath of the Great Fire (1666). Examining Shirley's prodigious output as a dramatist, his patrons, and the religious and social contexts of the production of his plays, provides important insights into how conversion was understood, experienced and dramatised in one of the most transformative periods of early modern British history.

In this essay I argue that Shirley's reworking of Ireland's key hagiographical narrative is a specifically dramatic attempt to engage with issues of political and religious controversy. His earlier reproductions of the staple fare of the stage in Caroline London had failed to attract and retain Dublin audiences. At the same time as Shirley and his theatrical collaborators were facing possible economic ruin in the face of competition from other forms of entertainment, an 'accepted understanding of how the political world worked underwent a crisis'.<sup>4</sup> People were willing to consider new intellectual maps and form groupings that were not necessarily based on ethnic allegiance, but rather shaped by the interpretation of particular texts, such as Scripture.<sup>5</sup> Faced with an uninterested clientele, Shirley deliberately chose to focus on a narrative that was at the core of Irish Catholic self-identity. But Patrick was also being reclaimed for Irish Protestants through the antiquarian researches of Archbishop James Ussher.<sup>6</sup> Shirley's careful reworking of his most probable primary source, Frater B.B.'s *Life of the Glorious Bishop S. Patricke* (1625)<sup>7</sup> – a Catholic hagiographical account of Patrick's life produced and published on the Continent – demonstrates his awareness of the potentially explosive nature of his subject material and his determination to offer a dramatic representation of Patrick that could not unambiguously be identified on ethnic, political or religious grounds. Through adopting an anachronistic form of

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<sup>4</sup> Gillespie R., "Political ideas and their social contexts in seventeenth-century Ireland", in Ohlmeyer J.H. (ed.), *Political Thought in Seventeenth-Century Ireland* (Cambridge: 2000) 127.

<sup>5</sup> Gillespie, "Political ideas and their social contexts in seventeenth-century Ireland" 127.

<sup>6</sup> Ford A., *James Ussher: Theology, History, and Politics in Early-Modern Ireland and England* (Oxford: 2007) 279.

<sup>7</sup> B.B. Frater, *The Life of the Glorious Bishop S. Patrick* (S. Omers, John Heigham: 1625).



theatre, drawing on the traditions of medieval drama, Shirley represents conversion in *St Patrick for Ireland* as inherently dramatic. This enabled him to validate the theatre's position as a medium of exchange in the religious and political debates that were preoccupying his Dublin audiences.

### *St Patrick for Ireland in Context*

Shirley worked hard during his time in Ireland to create a dramatic output that would appeal to his mixed audience at the Werburgh St theatre. Lucy Munro has noted the broad range of theatrical material upon which the new venue was able to draw, unrestricted by the tight censorship and carefully guarded repertoires of the London playhouses.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, Shirley's prologue to *St Patrick for Ireland*, the last of his plays to be performed during his period as a professional dramatist in Dublin from November 1636 to April 1640,<sup>9</sup> reveals condescension and bafflement, as well as a desire to please:

We know not what will take, your pallats are  
Various, and many of them sick I feare:  
We can but serve up what our Poets dresse,  
And not considering cost, or paines to please:  
We should be very happy, if at last,  
We could find out the humour of your taste [...] <sup>10</sup>

He was addressing a mixed audience – it may have included Englishmen centred upon the court of Sir Thomas Wentworth, Lord Deputy for Charles I. Evidence suggests that lawyers and soldiers were equally important constituents of the Dublin theatre-going public.<sup>11</sup> But it appears that the offerings of Shirley and various English actors and performers did not sufficiently attract the local population to make the Werburgh Street theatre a viable commercial endeavour. Shirley was positioned in a nexus of diverse religious, dramatic and political communities. By 1636 he had been the chief playwright in Caroline

<sup>8</sup> Munro L., "Dublin Tragicomedy and London Stages", in Mukherji S. – Lyne R. (eds.), *Early Modern Tragicomedy* (Cambridge: 2007) 176–177.

<sup>9</sup> Stevenson A.H., "Shirley's Years in Ireland", *The Review of English Studies* 20, 77 (1944) 19–28.

<sup>10</sup> Turner J.P. Jr. (ed.), *A Critical Edition of James Shirley's St Patrick for Ireland* (New York: 1979) Prologue, 1–5. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

<sup>11</sup> Morash C., *A History of Irish Theatre 1601–2000* (Cambridge: 2002) 6.

London for about a decade; the trip to Dublin was a new venture and a remarkable departure for him. Shirley worked in close association with Wentworth, who was executed at the behest of the English Parliament a year after the publication of *St Patrick for Ireland*. As an English (possibly Catholic) royalist, serving an Anglican Lord Deputy, in a predominantly Catholic country, Shirley's situation was difficult. During his three or so years in Dublin he attempted to forge a new dramatic culture under Wentworth's patronage.<sup>12</sup>

However, the succession of prologues and epilogues that Shirley wrote for various plays performed at the Werburgh Street theatre (his own, as well as those by Ben Jonson, Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher) demonstrate that his Dublin audience itself had distinctive preferences. Shirley, as a dramatist, faced stiff competition; the city offered several other entertainments that competed with '*the art and labour of a Play*'. Shirley initially reproduced the kind of theatrical spectacle that appealed so strongly to audiences in Caroline London, without much success. However, *St Patrick for Ireland* was different. For the first time, it appears, Shirley reshaped the structure and subject of an entire play, focusing on a '*Story, native knowne*,' in an attempt to appeal to the specific tastes of Dublin theatre-goers. There is no evidence that Shirley ever wrote the second part of Patrick's story envisaged in the prologue. This indicates that he did not receive a positive response; though it could also have been an inevitable result of the worsening political situation in Ireland. In the first part of this essay, I will explore the ways in which discourses of religious partisanship, ethnicity and culture function in Shirley's drama and their links with issues of contemporary import in the highly charged political atmosphere immediately preceding the Civil War.

The existence of a permanent theatre in Dublin was a new venture that was actively supported by Wentworth. It was financed and built by Shirley's friend, John Ogilby, who was later to become Master of the Revels in Ireland on 28 February 1638.<sup>13</sup> Shirley probably first arrived late in 1636; London theatres had been closed for some time due to the

<sup>12</sup> For a full discussion of James Shirley's period in Ireland see Williams J., *The Irish Plays of James Shirley, 1636–1640* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Dutton R., "The St. Werburgh Street Theater, Dublin" in Zucker A. – Farmer A.B. (eds.), *Localizing Caroline Drama: Politics and Economics of the Early Modern English Stage, 1625–1642* (New York: 2006) 132.

plague. However, the building of a public theatre did not pass without comment and was objected to by the Lord Primate of Ireland, James Ussher. That he had long preached against the spiritual danger of plays is evident from a reference in the autobiography of Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick and daughter of the Earl of Cork, who noted:

I then Stodyd the God=breathed=Oracles and spent much time in Reading the word, layeng by my Idelle bookes and by my Lord Primate of Irelandes Preaching against playes I was many yeares before resolved to leave seeing them, for as I remember I saw not above tow after my being married.<sup>14</sup>

Despite having a reasonably friendly relationship with Wentworth, who had in fact established his position as Archbishop in 1634, Ussher took what Alan Ford describes 'as the unusually brave and decisive action of closing down the theatre' when Wentworth was visiting England in 1637.<sup>15</sup> Ussher was a moderate and conciliatory primate; the fact that he undertook such a public action, in opposition to the known preferences of the Lord Deputy, demonstrates the strength of some local strands of opposition to the performance of plays. Wentworth's frustration was expressed in a letter to Archbishop Laud on 10 July, 1637:

But what long of the Provost, and what long of a Playhouse lately sett up and allowed by me which out of Purity of Zeale the Primate dureing my being in England had prohibited, least it might, forsooth, have brought a punishment of the Plague upon us, his Grace is very angry with me and saith that I neither care for Church or Church men where my owne Ends come in Question.<sup>16</sup>

However, it was not only the opposition of the religious authorities that rendered Shirley's position as the first known professional dramatist in Ireland problematic. The diverse communities within Dublin who may have patronised the theatre also presented a challenge. Drawing on the prologues of various plays performed at Werburgh Street, Christopher Morash concludes that:

while the audience [...] was by no means a representative sample of the predominantly Irish-speaking population of the island as a whole,

<sup>14</sup> British Library, Add. MS 27, 357, 23v.

<sup>15</sup> Ford, *James Ussher* 206.

<sup>16</sup> Strafford Letter Books, July 10, 1637 quoted by Dutton, 131. Note: *u* and *v* have been regularised and contractions silently expanded.

it did bring together the tight circle of courts, castle and college that would form the foundation of Irish theatre audiences for almost two centuries.<sup>17</sup>

Along with the diversity of his potential clientele, Shirley also had to compete with the various other (more appealing) forms of entertainment on offer. In a prologue to one of Fletcher's plays, he notes:

Were there a pageant now on foot, or some  
Strange Monster from *Peru*, or *Affrick* come,  
Men would throng to it; any Drum will bring  
(That beats a bloudlesse prize, or Cudgelling)  
Spectators hither; nay, the Beares invite  
Audience, and Bag-pipes can do more than wit.<sup>18</sup>

Shirley returns to several themes in his Irish prologues: the difference between Dublin and Ireland and London and England, usually to the disparagement of the Irish; the critical importance of wit; audience palate or taste; low audience turnout and serpents. The last is particularly interesting in the context of examining *St Patrick for Ireland*, where Shirley dramatises the traditional narrative of the saint's powerful expulsion of serpents from Ireland at the end of the play, representing his triumph against the pagan forces of darkness.<sup>19</sup> In another prologue to Fletcher, Shirley draws a parallel between these serpents

<sup>17</sup> Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre* 6.

<sup>18</sup> James Shirley, *Poems &c* (London, Humphrey Moseley: 1646) 43. This prologue was probably for Fletcher's play, *The Nightwalker*, performed in 1639. Rankin D., *Between Spenser and Swift: English Writing in Seventeenth-Century Ireland* (Cambridge: 2005) 101.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Fitz-Simon, *The Irish Theatre* (London: 1983) 13, suggests that it 'is perfectly possible that [the serpents] were portrayed by actors or by dancers, considering Ogilby's professional background. The scene may have been performed in the manner of a masque, a form of theatre fashionable at the time'. Alan Fletcher argues that the Cockpit, Drury Lane, was the most likely model for the interior of the Werburgh Street theatre. Shirley's play required 'at least two doors for entrances and exits, plus a means of disclosing a scene. (This latter could have been a 'discovery' area revealed by opening the central [i.e. a third] door to reveal an inner stage). The stage also had at least one trapdoor': Fletcher A., *Drama, Performance, and Polity in Pre-Cromwellian Ireland* (Cork: 2000) 265–266. A prompt-book copy of *St Patrick for Ireland* has survived in the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. An annotation alerts 'serpents be read[y]' two pages prior to their actual entrance, which indicates that this element of the play was taken seriously in at least one later performance of *St Patrick for Ireland*. Eva Griffith suggests that this copy may have been used by a seventeenth-century prompter at Smock Alley, Dublin: Griffith E., "A Prompt Book Copy of *St Patrick for Ireland* at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France", *Études Épistémè*, 17 (2010) 131–133.

and those who 'hisse' at the comedy on offer; it is again inflected with an ethnic twist:

An English Poet bid me tell you, when  
 He shall salute his Native shore agen,  
 He will report your stories, all this while  
 False, and that you have Serpents in this Isle.<sup>20</sup>

The concluding line clinches the barb: 'Be, or seem wise enough to like the Wit'.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, in his prologue to the *Irish Gentleman*,<sup>22</sup> Shirley draws a parallel between 'Wit', 'Poesie' and the 'Virgin Muses', transported (from England) to 'this promising clime' and 'Prophets'. He pleads with his audience not to treat poets with the same hatred previously accorded to prophets, who were killed by 'things of venome', as this would produce a 'storie' to 'staine' the reputation of their 'faire Island'.<sup>23</sup> The story of Patrick had obviously been in Shirley's mind for some time, before he attempted dramatically to represent the narrative of Ireland's patron saint. Serpents are a recurring motif in his Irish prologues and to some extent mark the distance between the London dramatist and his Dublin audience, as well as his attempt to bridge the gap. As with the prologue to *St Patrick of Ireland* itself, there is a mixture of condescension and a desire to please. The recurrence of the serpent motif, culminating in the triumphant narrative of Patrick's victory, is an index of Shirley's attempt to transform his dramaturgy for a specifically Irish context, and his failure properly to understand the Irish public. Neither his acerbic witticisms, nor his endeavours to appeal to nationalistic pride, were sufficient to woo a large, stable clientele for the Werburgh Street theatre.

Interpreting Shirley's attempts to rework the narrative and character of Patrick for an Irish audience of mixed religious allegiances is further complicated by the difficulties inherent in identifying his own religious position. Anthony Wood claimed that Shirley converted to Catholicism shortly after his ordination to the Anglican priesthood.<sup>24</sup> Many of his patrons were Catholics; he was associated with the court

<sup>20</sup> Shirley, *Poems* 35. This prologue is to Fletcher's, *No wit nor money*, dated 1639. Rankin, *Between Spenser and Swift* 104.

<sup>21</sup> Shirley, *Poems* 36.

<sup>22</sup> This prologue to a lost play can probably be dated to 1637. Rankin, *Between Spenser and Swift* 100.

<sup>23</sup> Shirley, *Poems* 38.

<sup>24</sup> Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses* vol. 2, 260–261.

of Henrietta Maria; he certainly supported the royalist cause during the Civil War. Yet Shirley was acting as a school-teacher following the Act of Uniformity in 1662, which required his consent to the articles of the re-established Church of England. This essay assumes that Shirley was willing at least outwardly to conform to the requirements of worship prescribed by the state church during his period in Ireland. Shirley's own religious ambivalence and his awareness of the multiple divisions within his audience help to explain the difficulties critics face in categorising *which* Patrick we are dealing with in this play. Morash has suggested, in general, that the plays Shirley wrote for Werburgh Street 'register an anxious awareness that he was not going to find an image of reconciliation for his divided audience'.<sup>25</sup> The diverse interpretations of the figure of Patrick bear out his observation. Raymond Gillespie, for example, states that: 'From one perspective the image of St Patrick was as a Church of Ireland bishop who wore not only a mitre but also "lawn that is whiter" (Act III.i). His impeccable Laudian credentials were further suggested by part of a prophecy predicting Patrick in which it is noted "and in the east his table stand" (Act I.i) in the manner of a Laudian altar. It was this Ireland', Gillespie argues, 'that received Patrick's blessing and his prophecy in Act V.iii that the government of Ireland would be blessed and the crown flourish: "the throne you shall leave glorious."' <sup>26</sup> Deana Rankin links this to the colonial aspect of the English enterprise, stating: 'The St Patrick of the title is no controversial Irish Catholic icon but the thoroughly English saint, bringer of civilisation to Irish shores, documented by James Ussher'.<sup>27</sup>

I do not think that *St Patrick for Ireland* is as clear-cut or straightforward in its message as these comments suggest. John Cox, for instance, notes that Shirley's play exploits the ambiguities inherent in an opposition between paganism and Christianity 'to the point of virtual irresolution'. He sees the priests singing in Latin as evidence of 'a tolerating impulse in the play', refusing to identify traditional Christianity with a duplicitous paganism. Cox traces this to Shirley's own

<sup>25</sup> Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre* 7.

<sup>26</sup> Gillespie, "Political ideas and their social contexts in seventeenth-century Ireland" 120–121. Laudian refers to those who supported the increasingly ritualised and uniform mode of worship prescribed by Archbishop Laud throughout the kingdoms of Charles I during the 1630s.

<sup>27</sup> Rankin, *Between Spenser and Swift* 102.

purported allegiance to Catholicism. He does, however, consider that this defence of Catholicism is 'severely compromised' by the play's attack upon a 'benighted Ireland' needing 'English enlightenment (and specifically religious enlightenment)'. Patrick thus becomes 'a precursor of Spenser and more particularly of Shirley himself, the English stage magician who writes a play about the most powerful magician in Irish history'.<sup>28</sup> Such links between religion (whether Laudian or Catholic), ethnicity and nationalism fail to do justice to the complex and sometimes competing forces at work in the shaping of Irish community and which find their focal point in Shirley's characterisation of Patrick in this play. Alan Ford has argued, for example, that the founding narrative based on the life of Patrick developed by James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, deliberately reconstituted relationships between Ireland's various communities in a combination that ran counter to traditional ethnic and religious formations.<sup>29</sup> Ford concludes:

Ussher, in sum, helped to create an Irish protestant sense of history that sustained them down to the twentieth century. In the process of doing so, he also contributed to many of the attributes and ambiguities which have characterised that tradition; strongly evangelical and hostile to Arminianism or high churchmanship; politically loyal to the English Crown, but proud of the independence of the Church of Ireland; English in culture, but tracing their roots back to the Gaelic church, and fiercely anti-Catholic, but living in a Catholic country.<sup>30</sup>

There are several sections of *St Patrick for Ireland* that are open to competing interpretations. These do not neatly conform to any of the national or religious agendas – Catholic, Laudian or colonial – outlined above. For instance, Act 2, Scene 2 of the play can be read as an attempt to deconstruct 'Romish' superstition. The characters Ferochus and Endarius deliberately impersonate Jupiter and Mars, with the active collusion of Archimagus, the chief figure within Irish pagan religion, as Shirley depicts it in the play. The king and queen are completely deluded and manipulated by these false 'idols'.<sup>31</sup> The

<sup>28</sup> Cox J., *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350–1642* (Cambridge: 2000) 199–201.

<sup>29</sup> Ford, *James Ussher* 119–132, 208–220.

<sup>30</sup> Ford, *James Ussher* 279.

<sup>31</sup> Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre* 8. He notes further that 'any simple allegorical reading of the play [...] is complicated' due to the multiple religious associations with the figure of Patrick (8).

effect is heightened by the bawdy commentary of Rodamant, servant to Archimagus, who notes:

These be new Deities, made since yesterday;  
 We shift our gods, as fast as some shift trenchers;  
 Pray sir what do you call their names? they are  
 But halfe gods, demi-gods as they say; there's  
 Nothing beneath the navell (2.2.1–5).

Such demystifications of religious authority mirror Protestant polemic critiquing attempts by Catholic priests to trick supposedly credulous worshippers with various miracles of saints, manipulation of relics and the like. However, Patrick cannot be claimed as a 'Protestant' saint. When he first appears it is as a man: 'With shaven Crowne, and in his hand/ A crooked Staffe; he shall command,/ And in the East his table stand' (1.1.55–57). While this could be read as a topical allusion to Laud's attempts to ensure that the altar was placed in the east of the church, thus having a clear contemporary political edge, it might also simply reflect Catholic traditions about where Patrick founded his first Irish church. Patrick is followed by a procession of priests, singing in Latin; the asceticism and linguistic register is a clear allusion to Catholic ritual and would have resonantly echoed as such with Catholics in Shirley's audience.<sup>32</sup> Shirley's attempt 'to find an image of reconciliation for his divided audience' required a deliberate ambivalence. This is clear in the way he reworks his probable source for the play: a narrative written by Jocelyn, Monk of Furness, which appeared in a Latin publication, Thomas Messingham's *Florilegium Insulorum Sanctorum* (Paris, 1624).<sup>33</sup> This was translated into English by an Irish monk, Frater B.B.,<sup>34</sup> with the overt intention of countering the rise of Protestantism and confirming the Irish in the Catholic faith. While Shirley retains many of the key miracles B.B. relates, he eliminates all references to Patrick's alleged visit to Rome and any overt allusions to the Pope authorising his mission to Ireland. When challenged by the Irish king, Leogarius, on his first arrival in the country, Patrick replies:

<sup>32</sup> Fletcher, *Drama, Performance, and Polity* 274, argues that this would have been seen as an intimation of religious toleration by Catholics in Shirley's audience.

<sup>33</sup> MacMullan H., "The Sources of Shirley's *St Patrick for Ireland*", *PMLA* 42 (1933) 806–814; Turner, *A Critical Edition of James Shirley's St Patrick for Ireland* 48–49.

<sup>34</sup> B.B. Frater, *The Life of the Glorious Bishop S. Patrick*.



[...] I have  
 Commission for my stay; I come not hither  
 Without command, Legat from him, before  
 Whose angry breath the rocks doe breake and thaw,  
 [...] This supreme King's command I have obey'd,  
 Who sent me hither to bring you to him,  
 And this still wandering nation [...] (1.1.200–210).

Patrick uses the term 'Legat', which has papal connotations. However, the context makes it clear that he sees himself as directly commissioned by God to convert the Irish, without reference to an intermediary ecclesiastical authority. The 'angry breath' that breaks and thaws rocks and the title of 'supreme King' strongly suggest Patrick is referring to God, rather than the Pope.

It is interesting to consider whether Shirley was perhaps trying to rehabilitate a concept of Christianity that could be embraced by all of his Dublin audience, focusing on the cultural nationalism that drew them together, rather than the sectarian religious divide which increasingly segregated them. This would help to explain why he decided radically to transform the staple Caroline tragicomedies that he had been writing for the Werburgh St theatre by reworking the traditional hagiographical account of Ireland's patron saint. In fact, his decision to focus on the life of Patrick was arguably the most significant factor ameliorating his dramaturgical practice during his stay in Dublin.<sup>35</sup> The genre of tragicomedy was particularly appropriate for the multifaceted depiction of religion, ethnicity and culture that Shirley was seeking to achieve; this is most apparent in the ambivalent ending, where Leogarius pragmatically accepts Patrick's presence, but remains antagonistic.<sup>36</sup> Shortly after *St Patrick for Ireland* was performed (probably late in 1639), Henry Burnell, a member of the Old English community in

<sup>35</sup> Rankin, *Between Spencer and Swift* 101, suggests that Shirley may have turned to the narrative of Ireland's patron saint in an attempt to minimise the impact that Dublin's military interest was having on the structure of his plays. She notes, 'Shirley increasingly pandered to military taste and the soldier – usually the stuff of comic subplot – was increasingly stealing the limelight': *The Opportunity* (1640) and *Rosania or Love's Victory* (1640), are cited as examples of this shift in Shirley's plots.

<sup>36</sup> Henry Burnell adopts the same genre in his dramatic response to Shirley's *St Patrick for Ireland*, *Landgartha* (Dublin: 1641). Deana Rankin has explored the appropriateness of tragicomedy to the seventeenth-century Irish situation more generally in Rankin D. "'Betwixt Both': Sketching the Borders of Seventeenth-Century Tragicomedy", in Mukherji S. – Lyne R. (eds.), *Early Modern Tragicomedy* (Cambridge: 2007) 193–208.

Ireland, wrote *Landgartha* (performed on 17 March, 1640). This play has been read as a direct response to Shirley's drama: taking issue with the sensational special effects, which Shirley introduced uniquely into *St Patrick for Ireland*, and providing an alternative, allegorical representation of the relationships between Ireland's various communities. Regardless of the failure of both plays to significantly shape the political situation in Ireland, particularly as the country disintegrated into civil war, the fact that *Landgartha* was the first play to be performed in a professional theatre by a named Irish playwright suggests that Shirley's attempt to engage his Dublin audience may not have been completely ineffective, despite the absence of a second part to *St Patrick for Ireland*.

Gillespie provides a helpful model for thinking about the connections between religious diversity, politics, ethnicity and community in early modern Ireland which are at the heart of Shirley's play and its reception. He explores the importance of various forms of media, including the role of the Werburgh Street theatre, in shaping political opinion and contributing to the formation of communities. He suggests that in times like the 1640s, when *St Patrick for Ireland* was published, people were willing to consider alternatives in order to build new intellectual maps. Gillespie specifically notes that the social groups attempting to articulate their sentiments and persuade others of the validity of their perspective 'were not necessarily ethnically based but rather were formed around the interpretation of particular texts, such as the Bible or other works'.<sup>37</sup> Deana Rankin, for example, argues that the debate to which both *St Patrick for Ireland* and Bunnell's *Landgartha* contributed 'was a formative part not just of Old English cultural identity in the years before the Irish rebellion, but also of English Catholic royalist identity in the three kingdoms on the verge of civil war'.<sup>38</sup> Gillespie's observations are critical; they attribute a significant potential for influence to the role that theatrical representations, such as Shirley's, could play in shaping public opinion. He also draws attention to the ways in which texts, particularly religious documents like the Bible, but potentially plays and other publications

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<sup>37</sup> Gillespie, "Political ideas and their social contexts in seventeenth-century Ireland" 127.

<sup>38</sup> Rankin, *Between Spenser and Swift* 99.

as well, contributed to the formation of communities centred upon allegiances other than ethnic or cultural affinities.

Shirley's play, focusing on Ireland's patron saint, deftly negotiating issues of religious difference, ethnicity and colonialism, can be construed as an attempt to foster precisely this kind of exchange between community groups. Though it is probably attributing too much authority to the theatre as a forum for public discussion in Dublin at this time, it is interesting to conjecture whether or not issues of religious, political and ethnic contention could have been explored less violently in a dramatic context, had Shirley had the imagination, courage or inclination to reshape his dramaturgy – as he does in *St Patrick for Ireland* – for an Irish locale in 1637, rather than 1639–1640. Burnell's topical and politically inflected response suggests that the incentive and ability to engage in such dramatic exchanges was present in Dublin. Unfortunately civil unrest prevented any further exploration of the political and communal roles that this short-lived, but enterprising attempt to establish a viable commercial theatre outside London might have fulfilled.

### *Conversion in St Patrick for Ireland*

The second part of this essay will explore Shirley's specifically dramatic response to the issues of political and religious controversy that shaped the cultural context within which he was writing in early modern Dublin. I will focus on Shirley's representations of conversion and his indebtedness to hagiography and medieval drama. Lucy Munro has demonstrated that Shirley's dramaturgy in *St Patrick for Ireland* draws both on John Beaumont and John Fletcher's development of tragicomedy for the Caroline stage in London and on a succession of saints' plays that were performed at the Red Bull theatre including *A Shoemaker a Gentleman*, *The Two Noble Ladies*, *The Martyred Soldier* and *The Virgin Martyr*.<sup>39</sup> Holly Crawford Pickett's analysis of the last of these plays – co-written by Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger in 1620 – identifies several key elements in the relationships between

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<sup>39</sup> Munro, "Dublin Tragicomedy and London Stages" 182–189.

theatre, audience and the representation of conversion that have important implications for interpreting Shirley's *St Patrick for Ireland*.<sup>40</sup>

Pickett suggests that the use of 'an older, more miraculous and self-consciously theatrical religious vision' is recommended 'through the deliberate dramatic anachronism' of resemblance to a medieval saint's play. This deliberate anachronism privileges 'a nostalgic and metatheatrical visual rhetoric over the corruptible vocabulary of reason'. The play thus offers a 'spectacle-centered solution to the problem of performing religious conversion' through its use of 'a defamiliarizing, archaic theatricality' embracing 'the theatricality of religious conversion' and 'leaving the question of its efficacy (and religious affiliations) intertwined' with the 'creative medium' of the theatre itself'.<sup>41</sup> She notes that this nostalgia for medieval theatre does not 'automatically align [the play] with Catholicism'; 'wonder' is also an important category in Protestant spirituality and the questions it raises are both aesthetic and doctrinal.<sup>42</sup> In asserting that a multisensory experience of conversion is not limited to Catholicism, Pickett postulates that *The Virgin Martyr* 'advances not Catholicism, but revelation – a revelation conveyed through the vocabulary of the (medieval) theater'.<sup>43</sup> The playwrights 'borrow from medieval dramatic convention' a belief in the transformative power of theater itself; by 'illustrating the power of God in a spectacular and easily comprehensible way' they attracted their audience and furthered 'the persuasive ends of the texts'.<sup>44</sup> Consequently, spectacle rather than rhetoric 'is the play's most effective conversion tool': this position 'is neither essentially Catholic nor Protestant, but rather [...] dramatic'.<sup>45</sup> By implicitly arguing that 'medieval saints can still provide viable models for religious transformation [...] they are [...] radical insofar as they embrace the theatricality of the moment' that is at the centre of such conversion scenes. 'Theater becomes the vehicle of spiritual transformation'. By making spectacle the 'ally of saving grace' conversion is ultimately inseparable from its theatrical representation. The 'self-conscious and defamiliarizing theatricality' characteristic of *The Virgin Martyr* 'makes the audience acutely aware' of this 'connection so

<sup>40</sup> Pickett H.C., "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion in Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*", *Studies in English Literature* 49, 2 (2009) 437–462.

<sup>41</sup> Pickett, "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion" 438–449.

<sup>42</sup> Pickett, "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion" 439–440.

<sup>43</sup> Pickett, "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion" 454.

<sup>44</sup> Pickett, "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion" 455.

<sup>45</sup> Pickett, "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion" 455.

that they, too, must admit the performative nature of religious change'.<sup>46</sup> Finally, Pickett claims that Dekker and Massinger employ this direct correlation between theatricality and spirituality 'in their play in order to critique the religious climate of their own day, while simultaneously recommending a solution in which their own craft as dramatists plays an essential role'. They embrace 'the theatricality of conversion without immediately reducing that theatricality to insincerity'; conversion and religious identity are inherently theatrical.<sup>47</sup>

Like Munro, Cox argues that *St Patrick for Ireland* is an 'enterprising' 'spin-off, of sorts' from *The Virgin Martyr*.<sup>48</sup> Cox suggests that in *St Patrick for Ireland* 'oppositional thinking' is reduced 'to a contest for power'. I think this is overly simplistic. His own recognition of the complexity and ambivalence characteristic of Shirley's representation of religion suggests as much.<sup>49</sup> Shirley is rare amongst Caroline dramatists in following Dekker and Massinger's decision to transform hagiographical material (in this case, the life of Patrick) for the stage. This may be an indication, as Munro suggests, of the unique position in which Shirley and the actors at the Werburgh St theatre found themselves, able to stage a collection of plays impossible in London and capitalising on their geographical remoteness by putting 'together something of a fantasy repertory'.<sup>50</sup> I have summarised Pickett's analysis at length because it offers some productive ways of thinking about Shirley's use of hagiographical material and staging of multiple conversions in a dramatic appeal to his Dublin audience that counters the reductionism of Cox's analysis and enables a dramatic explanation for the studied ambivalence of Shirley's religious representation discussed in the previous section of this essay.

Pickett's persuasive combination of aesthetic and doctrinal categories helps to transcend traditional dichotomies between Protestant and Catholic understandings of conversion to facilitate a more fruitful questioning of the role played by dramatic representations of conversion and their impact upon theatre audiences. The 'problem of authenticating religious conversion' is shifted 'away from soteriology

<sup>46</sup> Pickett, "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion" 455–456.

<sup>47</sup> Pickett, "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion" 456–457.

<sup>48</sup> Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama* 199–201; Munro, "Dublin Tragicomedy and London Stages" 175–192.

<sup>49</sup> Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama* 199–200.

<sup>50</sup> Munro, "Dublin Tragicomedy and London Stages" 177.

to epistemology, from the experience of the convert to the suspicions of his audience'.<sup>51</sup> Pickett's insistence that wonder and theatrical effect are not Catholic categories denied by a secularising Protestantism is crucial. This has direct relevance to Shirley's drama. A dedicatory verse written by John Bermingham for *Landgartha*, by the Old English Catholic, Burnell, dismisses dramatists (like Shirley, it is inferred) who use 'flames and fire/ Tempests and whirlwinds' in their plays.<sup>52</sup> Though Shirley's own religious allegiance at this point is unclear, it is important to note that this objection to his use of dramatic stage effects, such as snakes, fire, angels, devils and other anachronistic references to medieval theatre, emerges from a Catholic context, and that it is essentially aesthetic, rather than religious. The deployment of such dramatic medieval stage effects is also unique to Shirley's dramaturgy in *St Patrick for Ireland*; none of his other plays draw on them in the same way. Darryll Grantley notes that the 'recurrent theme of conversion in hagiography', which in turn had a strong impact upon medieval dramatisations of saints' lives, 'tends to give rise to the creation of strong binary oppositions in the narratives between diabolic and divine power [...] Thus the element of miracle becomes a prominent motif and occupies a significant place'.<sup>53</sup> In fact, given *St Patrick for Ireland's* 'commitment to the twofold aim of saints' plays, the representation of conversion and the depiction of divine miracle',<sup>54</sup> Shirley's drama could be defined as a saints' play in the tradition of medieval drama.

Shirley attempted to bring various political, ethnic and religious communities in Dublin together through his dramatisation of the narrative of Patrick, in part to generate commercially successful theatre, but also to foster a sense of community that privileged the role of the theatre as a forum for dialogue and exchange. In this section, I will look at the ways in which Shirley's representations of conversion in *St Patrick for Ireland* contribute to these two goals, but first it will be helpful to define what is meant by the term. Molly Murray suggests that conversion 'has been defined in two distinct ways: as a change of church and as a change of soul. Pagans and Jews become Christians

<sup>51</sup> Pickett, "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion" 451.

<sup>52</sup> Gillespie, "Political ideas and their social contexts in seventeenth-century Ireland" 120–121.

<sup>53</sup> Grantley D., "Saints and Miracles", in Beadle R. – Fletcher A.J. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: 2008) 276.

<sup>54</sup> Grantley D., "Saints and Miracles" 281.

by undergoing a ritual, baptismal induction into a new community, but also through *metanoia*, a word that literally indicates a change in spirit or mind, and is often translated into English as "repentance" or "penitence".<sup>55</sup> Both these are important components of the ways in which Shirley represents conversion on the stage. However, an additional layer of complexity is added by the presence of King Leogarius and his chief pagan priest, Archimagus. Often in the medieval period the conversion of a king or tribal leader from paganism to Christianity entailed the conversion of all of his subjects or followers.<sup>56</sup> While Shirley is drawing on source material that initially originates from this period, his representation of the conversion process is more complex. The King undoubtedly has substantive power. There is a strong national religion, which is threatened by the arrival of Patrick. Those who attempt to convert to Christianity are penalised by the state, supported by the pagan priests: for example, the sons of Dichu, Patrick's first convert, are condemned to death and later Leogarius imprisons his Queen when she converts to Christianity after seeing Patrick miraculously restore the comic Rodamant to life.

Nonetheless, Shirley's dramatic representation focuses primarily on individual transformation (in both the senses defined by Murray above) rather than on national or group conversions, which are more typical in early medieval accounts of pagan conversions to Christianity. Leogarius is undoubtedly a central figure. He is essentially driven by political considerations of power and security; this can render him spiritually duplicitous. Even at the conclusion of the play, Patrick mistrusts his profession of faith, which leaves open the possibility of a dramatic sequel. But the opposition of the King does not prevent numerous of his subjects (including his own family) experiencing individual conversions throughout the course of the play. Shirley may here be commenting on the tensions inherent in the post-Reformation

<sup>55</sup> Murray M., *The Poetics of Conversion in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: 2009) 7. In the Greek New Testament, the primary meaning of the word *metanoia* is repentance. The concept of penitence developed later when *metanoia* was translated as *paenitentia* in the Latin Vulgate. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Kittel G. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1967) vol. 4, 975–1008. See Burton J., *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579–1624* (Newark: 2005), Vitkus D., *Turning Turk: English Theatre and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570–1630* (New York: 2003) and Shapiro J., *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: 1996) for further discussion of the phenomenon of conversion (intercultural and interdenominational) on the early modern stage.

<sup>56</sup> Cusack C.M., *Conversion Among the Germanic Peoples* (London: 1998) *passim*.

confidence or expectation that entire populations would convert following the allegiance of their leader. This is obviously pertinent given the imperial ambitions of English settlers in Ireland, particularly Sir Thomas Wentworth's desire, ultimately, to see the entire Irish population convert to the Church of England, and the persecution that Irish Catholics had suffered for decades under English rule. It does, however, have to be set against possible readings of Patrick as a Briton destined to convert Ireland to the true faith from Roman superstition.<sup>57</sup> As we have seen, this is one way of interpreting Archimagus's cynical manipulation of the statues of Jupiter and Mars for his own political advancement and the erotic satisfaction of the king's daughters, Ethne and Fedella.

The conflict between spiritual good and evil is depicted as fundamentally unproblematic in the play. Patrick represents good – this is indicated through his companionship with angels, his ability to resist the power of evil spirits, the miracles he performs: bringing the dead back to life and unfreezing limbs, rescuing captives from fire, ridding the island of poisonous serpents and so on. Archimagus represents evil – unlike Leogarius, he never wavers in his commitment to the pagan gods, he is consistently destructive, he rules evil spirits and demons, he remains absolutely opposed to Patrick and Christianity and, finally, he descends into hell, Faustus-like, at the end of the play.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Gillespie, "Political ideas and their social contexts in seventeenth-century Ireland", 120–121.

<sup>58</sup> Shirley is probably drawing upon the figure of Archimago in Edmund Spenser's *Fairie Queene* (1590; 1596), particularly Book 1, when constructing the character of Archimagus. Like Archimago, Shirley's Archimagus is a master of deception and disguise; he delights in the use of false images in an attempt to retain the blind worship and political support of King Leogarius; finally, he utilises his evil powers in order to transform Corybreus and enable him to rape the virtuous and innocent Emireia. See, for example, Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama* 199–201. Andrew Hadfield has argued that Archimago is 'an obviously Catholic figure', but that it is difficult to distinguish between Una and Archimago, due to their use of disguise and the ambivalence of language and poetic form. '[T]ruth has to appear as a metaphorical hermaphrodite, a comparison which undermines the pure teleological thrust of the concept in the first place': Hadfield A., *Edmund Spenser's Irish Experience: Wilde Fruit and Salvage Soyl* (Oxford: 1997) 126–127. See also Herron T., *Spenser's Irish Work: Poetry, Plantation and Colonial Reformation* (Aldershot: 2007) 208–209. These allusions to Spenser's allegory complicate, rather than clarify, Shirley's multilayered representation of religion in *St Patrick for Ireland*. The perceived political, aesthetic and religious relevance of Spenser's life and work to the administration and representation of Ireland in the period 1633–1641 can be seen in the fact that John Ware dedicated the first print publication (1633) of Spenser's controversial *A View of the State of Ireland*, to the English Lord Deputy, Sir Thomas Wentworth. Edmund Spenser,



The representation of conversion, however, is carefully attenuated. Each human character who encounters Patrick is offered the opportunity to convert, including the most intransigent – Archimagus and Milcho. Individual conversions are differentiated from one another: Dichu and the Queen convert in response to the spectacle of miracle; Conallus appears to convert out of love for and loyalty to his mother; Emirea converts when she is offered the opportunity to redeem her virgin honour, lost through rape, by becoming a nun. Personal choice is crucial; unlike the attempts by Leogarius and Archimagus to enforce loyalty to the pagan gods or to prevent conversion to Christianity, Patrick does not use violence. The importance of personal choice is also depicted through offering a range of possible responses: Leogarius oscillates between rampant opposition and a politic allegiance to the most effective source of spiritual power; Milcho is resolutely set on destroying himself, rather than submitting to the evangelistic endeavours of his former slave, Patrick; the Bard is an example of the well-meaning, but worldly hearer, who is good-natured and will not harm Patrick, but is unwilling to let go of his pension, good food and wine, in order to attain salvation.

Although Patrick, as the companion of angels, evangelist and miracle-worker, is the primary agent of conversion in the play, his role in the drama overall is surprisingly minimal. This may be a deliberate decision on Shirley's part: perhaps because it is difficult to represent a miracle-worker and saint in the more human-centred mode of Caroline theatre; or possibly in order to show Patrick's affiliation with God, by giving him a role similar to that of the guardian angel Victor, who appears at moments of crisis – to deliver, to ensure conversion, to resist evil and promote peace, or to prophecy future events. In this respect Shirley has transformed his hagiographical source material, where the saint is very much the primary actor in the narrative. Despite the fact that the play is named after Patrick, in many ways the action focuses on the more human dramas of love, betrayal and political conflict. However, it is important to note that even the sexual subplot introduced by Shirley – Corybreus's rape of Emeria – may have been influenced as much by hagiographical tradition as by the

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*A View of the State of Ireland*, ed. Hadfield A. – W. Maley (Oxford: 1997). Richard McCabe explores the significance of Ireland in *The Fairie Queene* (1590) in McCabe R.A. *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment: Elizabethan Ireland and the Poetics of Difference* (Oxford: 2002) 101–164; for his discussion of Archimago see pp. 109–110.

representation of sexual violence in Jacobean and Caroline drama. Karen Bamford has illustrated the important debt of Jacobean 'saint's plays' to the hagiographical tradition: including *The Martyred Soldier* (1619), *The Virgin Martyr* (1620), *The Two Noble Ladies and the Converted Conjuror* (c. 1623).<sup>59</sup> In *St Patrick for Ireland* sexual assault is staged as a theatrical event and the rape of the female body becomes a mechanism for exposing the moral corruption and political hypocrisy of Irish pagan religion (as represented by Archimagus and exploited by the elder prince, Corybreus).<sup>60</sup>

The play retains at its centre representations of the process of conversion; this was a defining element of the genre of saints' plays and was a crucial aspect of their performance in the medieval period. This process

which involved the complete transformation from one inner state of being to another, would itself have been considered a supreme mystery, and the visual realisation of this transformation on stage is part of the drama's theatrical realisation of divine power. . . . To a religious audience, the plays represent the operation of divine power in material form, and the seemingly miraculous nature of some of the devices used in the more technologically sophisticated aspects of this drama functions as a visual analogy to the miracle of conversion itself. It is also this more spiritual manifestation of divine miracle that was to survive the advent of Protestantism [...] [T]heatrical feints of a sometimes remarkable degree of sophistication [were required] to achieve [the] narrative and philosophical ends [of saints' plays].<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Bamford K., *Sexual Violence on the Jacobean Stage* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: 2000) 33–34.

<sup>60</sup> Shirley could also be alluding here to the various attempts by Archimago to tempt, or subject, Una and the Red Cross Knight to sexual desire and sin in Spenser's *Fairie Queene*.

<sup>61</sup> Grantley, "Saints and Miracles" 284–285. The problematic issues, both doctrinal and aesthetic, which the act of representation itself raised for playwrights and audiences in the aftermath of the Reformation are explored in O'Connell M., *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England* (Oxford: 2000). Huston Diehl, through a careful analysis of *The Winter's Tale*, demonstrates that there is an important place for wonder on the stage in Protestant aesthetics and doctrine, as well as in the saints' plays of the Roman Catholic Church: Diehl H., "'Strike All that Look Upon With Marvel': Theatrical and Theological Wonder in *The Winter's Tale*" in Reynolds B. – West W.N. (eds.), *Rematerializing Shakespeare: Authority and Representation on the Early Modern English Stage* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: 2005) 19–34. I am not trying to argue that the aesthetics of Shirley's play demonstrate either Protestant or Catholic tendencies, simply that there was space within the theology of wonder and spectacle embraced by both groups to allow for the kind of miraculous displays that Shirley depicts.

Representations of conversion in *St Patrick for Ireland* are not instruments for propaganda in the overt way that they function in Frater B.B.'s hagiographical account of Patrick's life. This is partly due to the generic transformation from saint's life to stage-drama. The basic ideological message of the play is clear – Patrick is going to convert pagan Ireland to Christianity – but this is also written into Shirley's historical sources. The question of which 'historical Patrick' we are dealing with was an issue of intense controversy at the time Shirley wrote the play, as the description of Archbishop Ussher's antiquarian research, discussed above, makes clear. If the play, in performance, is attempting to cultivate a sensory experience for the viewer that enacts conversion, the range of dramatic responses that Shirley attributes to characters in his drama makes interpreting this in terms of propaganda highly problematic. Alongside the straightforward conversions of the Queen and Dichu, there is the politic scheming of Leogarius, who remains resistant, and the lukewarm worldliness of the good-natured Bard, who is portrayed sympathetically. While it is clear that the evil Archimagus, the lustful prince, Corybreus, and the selfish Milcho are unequivocally condemned as a result of their hard-hearted resistance to Patrick, it is not possible to dismiss the responses of Leogarius and the Bard in the same way. The play ends on an ambivalent note. The Queen and Dichu have proved the authentic nature of their conversions (through adopting the lifestyle of a hermit and suffering imprisonment, respectively), but Leogarius is an unwilling convert, and the swift conversions of Emeria, Conallus, and possibly Dichu's sons at the end of the play, have not yet been tested in the same way. Patrick's concluding lines are extremely equivocal – Leogarius remains a very real threat to these fledgling converts and some amongst them may be called upon to prove the authenticity of their conversion through martyrdom at a future date:

I suspect him still;  
But feare not, our good angels still are neer us:  
Death at the last can but untie our frailty;  
'Twere happy for our holy faith to bleed,  
The Blood of Martyrs is the Churches seed (5.3.150–154).

Shirley does not explore the role of martyrdom in conversion, or as dramatic spectacle, in any depth in the play. However, the references to possible death (for Dichu's sons, the Queen and other converts), and Patrick's ominous (if unoriginal) observation that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church at the end of the play, indicate

that Shirley is drawing upon martyrology in order to explore the complexities of religious conflict and identity. Susannah Brietz Monta observes:

martyrology is a key genre through which early modern writers grappled with religious change and conflict [...] [F]ocus[ing] [...] questions concerning authority and resistance, the nature of the church, religious subjectivity, justification and sacrament, and historical continuity (or discontinuity). Martyrological controversies led writers to imagine the delineation of individual and corporate religious identities as a competition between variant forms of steadfastness, resolve and sacrifice.<sup>62</sup>

Patrick's concluding speech leaves several troubling questions unresolved: whose 'holy faith' is he speaking about? Which church will grow from the blood of the prospective martyrs? The studied ambivalence takes us back to the complex issues of political commitment and religious identity that were raised in the first half of this essay. What, if anything, is Shirley suggesting about the relationship between England and Ireland on the verge of civil war? And, more pertinently to the concerns of this section, are conversion and colonisation simply two sides to the same imperial project – the subjugation of Ireland by the English?

Shirley's theatrical reworking of Ireland's central hagiographical narrative is a specifically dramatic attempt to engage with the political and religious controversies that fractured his Dublin audiences. Through deliberately adopting an anachronistic form of drama, perhaps inspired by the earlier repertoire of the Red Bull theatre – turning the medieval saints' play into a Caroline tragicomedy – Shirley is recommending an older tradition that is both miraculous and self-consciously theatrical in its religious vision. The focus on spectacle and wonder – as seen in the use of miracles, devils, angels, fire and serpents – enables, as I have explored at length in the second part of this essay, a non-sectarian performance of religious conversion. In Pickett's terms, the use of 'a defamiliarizing, archaic theatricality' embraces 'the theatricality of religious conversion' and 'leav[es] the question of its efficacy (and religious affiliations) intertwined' with the 'creative medium' of the theatre itself.<sup>63</sup> In effect, theatre becomes the mechanism for

<sup>62</sup> Monta S.B., *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: 2005) 1.

<sup>63</sup> Pickett, "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion" 438–439.

spiritual transformation. The deliberate invocation of medieval dramaturgy emphasises the correlation between theatrical and spiritual transformation. As we have seen, Shirley's dramatic representation of Patrick is deliberately ambiguous; it cannot be neatly identified in ethnic, political or religious terms. This allows Shirley to critique certain aspects of his religious climate and to emphasise the important role of the theatre in resolving its inherent tensions; *St Patrick for Ireland* invites the active participation of the audience through its dramatic representation of conversion as inherently theatrical, without thereby stigmatising conversion as insincere. The authentication of conversion becomes a matter of epistemology, rather than soteriology; the focus is on the suspicions of the audience, rather than the experience of the convert.<sup>64</sup> Shirley's poised ambivalence, viewed from this angle, can be seen as a deliberate strategy. Firstly, to appeal to a broader audience and ensure the benches at the Werburgh Street theatre were filled. Secondly, and more innovatively, to stage issues of intense political and religious debate in 1639–1640 Dublin in a way that underwrote the doctrinal and aesthetic significance of the theatre as a medium for the public interrogation of pressing issues and as a space which enabled the formation of new intellectual maps.

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<sup>64</sup> Pickett, "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion" 451.

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SALUTARY READING:  
CONVERSION AND CALVINIST HUMANISM IN  
CONSTANTIJN HUYGENS' *OOGHENTROOST*

Lise Gosseye

As secretary to the stadtholder and influential diplomat, the political importance of Constantijn Huygens (1596–1687) in the Dutch Republic of the seventeenth century can hardly be overstated. As a poet and patron to the arts, neither can his cultural importance. Because of his long life, spanning nearly the entire seventeenth century, his interesting social position, and his large literary production, Huygens' life and work has been subject to much scholarly research. Recently the poet's work has been studied as an interesting testimony to Stephen Greenblatt's conception of the Renaissance phenomenon of self-fashioning.<sup>1</sup> While that line of study yields interesting results, I would, however, like to place one of Huygens' longer poems in the intellectual framework William Bouwsma has provided for the Renaissance in his famous text "The Two Faces of Humanism. Stoicism and Augustinianism in Renaissance Thought" and show how the confrontation of humanism's two faces in a single text can shed a new and interesting light on the early-modern self as well.

In 1646, Huygens started writing a long consolatory poem (1002 lines) for his dear friend Lucretia van Trello who was steadily going blind due to cataract.<sup>2</sup> It had been a rather disastrous professional year for the diplomat and poet who was elbowed aside in his position as secretary of prince Frederik Hendrik probably by agency of his wife princess Amalia herself. Both the prince and princess expressed

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<sup>1</sup> For instance in Broekman I., *De rol van de schilderkunst in het leven van Constantijn Huygens (1596–1687)* (Hilversum: 2005) and Blom F.R.E., "Solliciteren met poëzie. Zelfpresentatie in Constantijn Huygens' debuutbundel *Otia*", *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 23, 2 (2007) 230–244.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on Lucretia van Trello and her relationship with Huygens, see Lieburg M.J. van, "Constantijn Huygens en Suzanna van Baerle. Een pathobiografische bijdrage", *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 3, 2 (1987) 171–180, Pieters J. – Gosseye L., "Blindheid en inzicht. De retoriek van het lezen in Constantijn Huygens' *Ooghentroost*", *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 123, 3 (2007) 208–225.

their displeasure with the secretary on several occasions throughout the year.<sup>3</sup> The feeling of melancholy and bitter disappointment that must have followed this grievous experience can be felt throughout the poem, the last lines of which were written on January 5, 1647. At the end of his *annus horribilis* Huygens had sought refuge and consolation in his library and what he had read there is mulled over and deeply felt in the poem. When he started to write, Huygens conceived of *Oogentroost* as a *consolatio caecitatis*, a consolatory poem for the blind. The result of his efforts, however, is much more than that. The poem can be read as a consolatory letter but also as a satire, a commonplace book, a literary autobiography and a highly personal meditation on Huygens' reading of different philosophers. Huygens-biographer Jacob Smit is kind about the poem. He calls it a general moralization that is beautifully converted into mild skepticism and praises its deepening of the personal religious life.<sup>4</sup> Other readers have taken a more critical approach to the poem. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Dutch literary historian Kalff wrote:

One can hardly discern another scheme to *Oogentroost* than that emerging from lines 131–132: 'My maelt een lange lijst van blinden in het hoofd. / Sy moeten d'er eens uyt'. Indeed, the poem does not yield anything but a list of the blind even if it is true that a lot of entries on that list have some merit; but here again it is apparent that Huygens' [poetical] strength lies in analysis rather than synthesis.<sup>5</sup>

The poem's literary quality is indeed a bit uneven, to put it mildly, but while the enumeration of blind people in the middle (the 'list of the blind' that Kalff is referring to) is overwrought at best and at times even dreary, there is in fact more to the poem than a simple long 'list of the blind'. The poem is a strange mix of a *consolatio caecitatis* and a satire. Its peculiarity rests not only on the seemingly opposed ends of the two genres but also on the abruptness with which the genres appear to have been thrown together. The poem never seems

<sup>3</sup> Smit J., *Het leven van Constantijn Huygens. De grootmeester van woord- en snaarspel* ('s Gravenhage: 1980) 226.

<sup>4</sup> Smit, *Het leven van Constantijn Huygens* 227.

<sup>5</sup> 'In *Oogentroost* kan men bezwaarlijk een ander plan ontdekken dan wat daarvan blijken mag uit vs. 131–132: "Mij maelt een lange lijst van blinden in het hoofd. / Sy moeten d'er eens uyt". Inderdaad, iets anders dan een lijst van blinden geeft dat gedicht ons niet, al is het waar dat vele posten op die lijst verdienstelijk mogen heeten; maar ook hier blijkt dat Huygens' kracht meer ligt in de ontleding dan in de samenstelling'. Kalff G., *Constantijn Huygens* (Haarlem: 1901) 159 [my translation].

to become a true melting pot of consolation and satire. The genres remain separate, each delegated to its share of the poem's lines. The first 140 lines are clearly consolatory. The bulk of the poem, however, is formed by the satirical series of 34 types of people (lines 141 to 940) all blinded, metaphorically by some or other characteristic trait or even their profession. In the last 50 lines Huygens returns to the register of the consolation.

The oppositional goals of a satire, which aims to shock the reader and through this shock effectuate some sort of change, and of a *consolatio*, which is aimed at comforting and thus can never result in anything other than the acceptance of the *status quo*, has been remarked upon before.<sup>6</sup> Among the poem's other peculiarities are also more than 600 citations from different sources that Huygens' included in the poem's margins. In the introductory poem – written in Latin – that accompanies the text, Huygens refers to these margins as the riverbank on which the reader can rest should the river – the actual poem – prove disappointing. The quotes all seem to accompany certain lines of the poem. Sometimes there are five or more citations elucidating or deepening the argumentation of one single line. Most of the quotes are from classical authors. Seneca for instance is one of the most frequently quoted authors with 64 quotations. Especially, and not coincidentally, his *Letters to Lucilius* served as a great source of inspiration for *Ooghentroost*. Stoic consolations in general provided Huygens with a great range of consolatory *topoi* and he made frequent use of them.<sup>7</sup> There are far fewer quotes from Christian authors or the church fathers to be found in the margins and no contemporary authors at all. Augustine is only quoted eight times.

With this essay, I contend that Huygens' *Ooghentroost*, in an effort that is typical of the early-modern humanist as well as the strict Calvinist, combines the Augustinian content of Grace with the Stoics' ethical reading practice in which Reason dominates the other faculties in order for reading to become a way to change behaviour.<sup>8</sup> This structure leads to an epiphanic act of reading in which the reader is brought to a

<sup>6</sup> See for instance De Kruyter C.W., *Constantijn Huygens' Oogentroost. Een interpretatieve studie* (Meppel: 1971) 21.

<sup>7</sup> For a complete analysis of the Stoic consolatory *topoi* in *Ooghentroost* see De Kruyter, *Constantijn Huygens's Oogentroost*.

<sup>8</sup> For more on reading and ethics in late antiquity see: Stock B., "The Self and Literary Experience in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages", *New Literary History* 25, 4 (1994) 839–852, Id., "Ethical Values and the Literary Imagination in the Later Ancient

conversion – an acceptance of Grace that involves a change in behaviour. As I will show, in spite of the near absence of Augustinian content in the poem's margins and even in spite of the overwhelming use of Stoic *topoi* in the body of the text, Huygens' argumentation, especially in its consolatory form, is deeply rooted in Augustine's thoughts on Grace, his theology of light, and his ideas of the *visio Dei* as the highest form of knowledge to be reached.<sup>9</sup> Huygens effectively, although perhaps unwittingly, creates a friction between the Augustinian ideas in the main text and the Stoic thought found in its *topoi* and its margins. It is this friction that structures the argumentation to lead up to conversion. Simultaneously, I would like to link up Huygens' text and the way it renders the friction between Stoicism and Augustinianism with the broader social conflict between those two philosophical strands that Bouwsma identified as being at the heart of humanism. Bouwsma's argumentation in turn fits into a larger conceptual framework that is provided by Hans Blumenberg's understanding of early-modern *Selbstbehauptung*. In the German philosopher's concept of self-assertion, emphasis is placed on the early-modern subject's new need to understand himself and the world surrounding him, as medieval ideas fail to provide answers to the question of how to live in the modern world.<sup>10</sup> For Bouwsma, Stoicism and Augustinianism provided new answers; answers that met the Renaissance needs to understand an unpredictable and threatening new world in which urban disorder and larger social mobility shook up the life of the individual.<sup>11</sup> I will build up my argumentation by focusing on a number of lines that not only deal with the core of Huygens' consolatory message to Lucretia,

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World", *New Literary History* 29, 1 (1998) 1–13, Id., "Reading, Ethics, and the Literary Imagination", *New Literary History* 34, (2003) 1–17.

<sup>9</sup> When I refer to Huygens' Augustinianism I indicate the idea complexes on mental vision and the theology of light as they are identified by Margaret Miles and Hans Blumenberg: Miles M., "Vision: The Eye of the Body and the Eye of the Mind in Saint Augustine's *De trinitate* and *Confessions*", *The Journal of Religion* 63, 2 (1983) 125–142, and Blumenberg H., "Licht als Metapher der Wahrheit. Im Vorfeld der Philosophischen Begriffsbildung", *Studium Generale* 10 (1957) 431–447.

<sup>10</sup> See: Blumenberg H., *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge, MA – London: 1983).

<sup>11</sup> Bouwsma W.J., "The Two Faces of Humanism. Stoicism and Augustinianism in Renaissance Thought", in Oberman H.A. – Brady T.A. (eds.), *Itinerarium Italicum. The Profile of the Italian Renaissance in the Mirror of its European Transformations*. (Leiden: 1975) 3–60.

but that exemplify these new and conflicting world-views that make up the poem quite poignantly.

You and I have now finished reading the World.  
 Do you think it would be too early for us  
 To close the Book and create on that Text  
 What is wisest for man, is as crazy as it gets,  
 [65] Our blind Sermon, our eyeless contemplation?  
 Would not the grace of Heavens have want to hurt us,  
 To see inward, and, windows closed,  
 Tired of the storm and noise of the streets,  
 Look upon our belongings and provide our dry Lamps  
 [70] With Oil, in case the Bridegroom comes, and  
 The midnight thief unlocks our bolts,  
 And steals us from us, through the cracks of death?  
 Two eyes made of glass, of nerves and water  
 Weren't made for that: we share them with Tomcat  
 [75] And Cat, and every animal sees.  
 But God has provided our soul with a better light,  
 There, a different ray is pointed to something greater,  
 Wise people are their own telescopes,  
 [80] And he who uses himself wisely, won't need Glasses,  
 And he who uses himself thusly, can only sigh,  
 For a lost eye: but let him with his Reason,  
 Spend the remainder of his days to God and Him;  
 His soul is full of works, and in those activities  
 He won't have a single hour to spend on the vanity  
 [85] Of the century; to the heavenly ages  
 Will his thoughts go, he shall have to praise God  
 For the extraordinary favour that showed the bright day  
 That showed the eternal light, never seen by the eyes  
 Never understood by the heart, to the heart's eyes  
 [90] In advance and earlier than usual  
 Blind people's hands have, out of longing for that sight  
 Smashed their own windows; they robbed themselves of the lovely  
     premises  
 Of sight by homicidal force,  
 They hid from their vanity inside of themselves  
 [95] And they have learned more science in that dark school  
 Than they would have done as worldly-wise men,  
 Believing to understand the secrets of Nature.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> 'Nu hebben Ghij en Ick de Wereld uytgelesen. / Wat dunckt u, soud 't voor ons all heel ontijdigh wesen, / Het Boeck eens toe te slaen, en maken op dien Text / Op 's menschen aller wijst, dat is op 'taller ghex, / (65) Ons blindeling Sermoen, ons ooghelooos bedencken? / Soud' niet des Hemels gunst ons hebben willen krencken /

*De Kruyter and the Neo-Stoic argument*

In the only complete analysis of this text to date De Kruyter refers to the plea for turning inward (ll. 61–73) as a traditional consolatory *argumentum* that can already be found in the works of Cicero (*Tusculanae disputationes*) and Seneca (Letter 66 of the *Letters to Lucilius*).<sup>13</sup> The opposition between mental and physical seeing that is being built up from line 73 to line 107 is in keeping, as De Kruyter notes, with the traditional Augustinian distinction between *sapientia* and *scientia* – true wisdom on the one hand and knowledge on the other hand.<sup>14</sup> De Kruyter believes that the ‘Neo-Platonic-dualistic’ outlook that he discerns in Huygens’ reasoning can be traced to the work of Seneca.<sup>15</sup> He proves the relation between Seneca’s argument and Huygens’ text by referring to a citation by Seneca that can be found in the margin of line 83b.

Although he had already noted the affinity of Huygens’ argument with the Augustinian notion of wisdom, De Kruyter again emphasizes the Augustinian undercurrent of Huygens’ argumentation by stating that this ‘Neo-Platonic dualism’ can also be found in the works of the

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Om binnewaerts te sien, en, met de ramen toe, / Der stormen en ’s geruchts der straten even moe, / Ons goedjen t’overslaen, en onse drooghe Lampen / (70) Van Olie te versien, om of de Bruijgom quamp, en / De middernachtsche dief ons’ grendelen ontsloot, / En stal ons uyt ons, door de reten van de dood? / Twee ooghen van gelas, van zenuwen en water / En dienen daer niet toe: die zijn ons met den Kater / (75) En met de Katt gemeen; en alle beesten sien. / Maer God heeft onse ziel met beter licht versien, / Daer slaet een’ ander’ strael naer binnen op wat ryckers: / De wijze luyden zijn haer’ eighen verrekijckers, / En die sich wel gebruyckt en hoeft geen’ Brillen meer; / (80) En die sich soo gebruyckt magh suchen, en niet meer, / Om een verloren oogh: maer laet hem met syn’ Reden / Den overighen dagh aen God en Hem besteden, / Hy heeft de ziel voll wercks; en, in die besigheid / En sal hem niet een’ uer, niet een’, voor d’ydeldheid / (85) Der eewen over zijn: door d’eewen van daer boven / Sal syn gedachte gaen, hy sal God moeten loven / Voor d’ongemeene gunst, die hem den hellen dagh / Die hem het eewigh licht, dat ooghe noijt en sagh, / Noyt menschen hert begreep, met synes herten ooghen / (90) Bij voorraad open doet en voor de hand beooghen. / De lust van dat gesicht heeft blinder menschen hand / Haer’ glasen in doen slaen; sy hebben ’tlieve pand / Van kycken aen haer selfs moordadelick ontstolen, / Sy hebben in haer selfs haer’ ydelheid ontscholen, / (95) En in die donck’re school meer wetenschaps geleert / Dan daer sij, met den naem van wereld-wijs vereert / Natuers geheimeniss geloofden te begripen’. Worp J.A., *De gedichten van Constantijn Huygens* (Groningen: 1898) 64–95 [my translation].

<sup>13</sup> De Kruyter, *Constantijn Huygens’ Oogentroost* 96.

<sup>14</sup> On the concept of wisdom in Augustine and on the importance of illumination to true wisdom see: Jerphagnon L., *Augustin et la sagesse* (Paris: 2006) 57–102.

<sup>15</sup> De Kruyter, *Constantijn Huygens’ Oogentroost* 98.

church fathers where it is 'mixed with Christian elements', thereby putting both strands of thinking on a par.<sup>16</sup> Here again De Kruyter delivers proof by pointing to citations of Augustine and Jerome in the margins of line 83b.

Next to the affinity De Kruyter sees in Huygens' text with Seneca and the Church Fathers alike, there is also a connection with humanists like Erasmus and Lipsius to be found, or so De Kruyter asserts, in the 'appreciation of reason' that speaks from these lines.<sup>17</sup> De Kruyter opposes this trust in Reason's superiority over the passions, to Calvin's denial of Reason's ability to gain insight in godliness. To summarize, De Kruyter believes Huygens' argumentation in these lines shows a clear affinity with Seneca, the church fathers and humanists alike. A stricter Calvinistic interpretation of the lines, in which man's dependence on grace to reach divine illumination would be emphasized and which would be more in keeping with the poem's Augustinian undercurrent, is silently rejected by De Kruyter.

Within these lines and within this argumentation, De Kruyter pays special attention to lines 76 to 90 that deal with the riches of the spiritual eye. He discerns a consolatory *argumentum* that can also be found in Petrarch, but seems at a loss when it comes to interpreting these lines. He does not seem to be able to go beyond stating the similarity between Huygens' text and that of Petrarch:

This Neoplatonic-Christian argumentation that feels somewhat mystical, can also be found in Petrarch's *de caecitate*: Dolor, who is blind, cannot see heaven and earth with his bodily eyes [...].<sup>18</sup>

What I would like to argue here is that it is precisely this 'mystical' argument that reveals a deeper affinity with Augustinianism – especially with a deeply mystical strand of Augustinianism – than De Kruyter's identification of Petrarch's *De Caecitate*. By the same token, it is the complete absence of this degree of mysticism and other-worldliness in Stoicism that makes De Kruyter's interpretation of Huygens' argumentation as Senecan, Christian humanist but not Calvinistic an

<sup>16</sup> De Kruyter, *Constantijn Huygens' Oogentroost* 98: 'vermengd met christelijke elementen'.

<sup>17</sup> De Kruyter, *Constantijn Huygens' Oogentroost* 99.

<sup>18</sup> De Kruyter, *Constantijn Huygens' Oogentroost* 100: 'De enigszins mystiek aan-doende, neoplatonisch-christelijke argumentatie kan men ook aantreffen in Petrarca's *De caecitate*: Dolor die blind is, kan met zijn lichamelijke ogen hemel en aarde niet zien [...]'. [my translation].

untenable proposition.<sup>19</sup> Although De Kruyter remarks upon Huygens' use of Christianized Stoic *topoi* and upon Huygens' kinship with Lipsius, he refrains from identifying the text as an example of Neo-Stoicism. Whether or not De Kruyter intentionally discards the Neo-Stoicism in the text, I agree with his assessment because rather than presenting the reader with a Neo-Stoic welding of Christianized Stoic *topoi*, Huygens' text renders the conflicting and antithetical aspects of both worldviews. Although there is a lot to be said for classifying the text as an example of a Neo-Stoic consolation, I will treat it as a classic *consolatio* that incorporates both Stoic and Augustinian elements in a way that is both problematic and productive.

### *The soul's activities*

Huygens includes no less than five quotes to accompany the, at first sight, rather trivial half-line 'and in those activities': two by Saint Jerome, one by Augustine, one by Claudianus Mamertus and one by Seneca the Younger.<sup>20</sup> It is surprising to see that the line is accompanied by only one quotation from a classical author but by three quotations from Church-Fathers and one from an early-Christian author (four Christian sources in all), since Huygens' margins, as I have already mentioned, on the whole contain considerably more classical than Christian quotes. That is why it is especially in these lines leading

<sup>19</sup> In the context of Huygens' text, the word 'Stoicism' is meant to denote the Senecan consolatory *topoi* De Kruyter has identified. I am aware that Stoicism, Augustinianism, humanism and Calvinism are not necessarily antithetical in every aspect. The focus of my reading of Huygens' text is however on the antithetical elements within these idea complexes because previous analyses of the poem have disregarded these conflicts and have put disproportionate emphasis on the Stoicism alone.

<sup>20</sup> 'Without the body, the spirit sees thus not something bodily or that is spread in different places, but contemplates with an incorporeal look the Truth itself (that is, to the highest degree incorporeal, God)'. Claudianus Mamertus, 'On the state of the soul' my translation after Zwaan F.L., *Constantijn Huygens' Ooghen-Troost* (Groningen: 1984). 'From this story you may perceive how much better it is to have spiritual than carnal vision and to possess eyes into which the mote of sin cannot fall'. St. Jerome, Letter 68, to Castrutius, in: Schaff P. – Wace H., *St. Jerome: Letters and Select Works* (Peabody: 2004). 'You should not grieve that you are destitute of those bodily eyes which ants, flies, and creeping things have as well as men; rather you should rejoice that you possess that eye of which it is said in the Song of Songs, You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; you have ravished my heart with one of your eyes. This is the eye with which God is seen'. St. Jerome, Letter 76, to Abigaus, in: Schaff P. – Wace H., *St. Jerome*.



up to 'and in those activities [of the soul]' that the friction between Huygens' classical sources and his Christian argumentation can be felt. The 'strange' consolatory argument that De Kruyter discerned is not a classical consolatory argument, as it does not lead up to *apatheia*. It is a wholly Christian(-ized) argument.

The activities referred to in the line appear to be those of the soul that rationally contemplates God: 'but let him with his Reason, / spend the remainder of his days to God and Him; / His soul is full of works, and in those activities / he won't have a single hour to spend on the vanity / of the century'. The work of the soul is the rational contemplation of God that is carried out by the supremely mystical concept of the eye of the heart that is mentioned five lines on. Apart from the quote by Mamertus which was taken from his prose treatise written in Augustinian manner and dealing with the status of the soul, *De Statu Animae*, the quotations are all taken from letters. More specifically, three of them (those by Augustine and Saint Jerome) are taken from consolatory letters. All of them deal with the question of the (im) materiality of the soul but I will only take the letters by Augustine and Seneca into account here.

Truly that Light is God Himself, for 'God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all' (1 John 1:5); but He is the Light of purified minds, not of these bodily eyes. And the mind shall then be, what meanwhile it is not, able to see that light. But this the bodily eye neither now is, nor shall then be able to see. (Augustine, Letter 92, to Lady Italica)

Then you will say that you have lived in darkness, after you have seen, in your perfect state, the perfect light – that light which now you behold darkly with vision that is cramped to the last degree. And yet, far off as it is, you already look upon it in wonder; what do you think the heavenly light will be when you have seen it in its proper sphere? (Seneca, Letter 102 to Lucilius: 'On the Intimation of our Immortality').<sup>21</sup>

Although at first glance both quotations under consideration here seem to take a similar stance on the status of the soul (namely that it is immaterial and therefore with its special vision can see an immaterial deity), the quote by Seneca differs radically from the others when we take the broader context, that is the entire letter it was taken from, into account. What soul means for Seneca is something quite different than what it means for Augustine. In his 102nd letter to Lucilius,

<sup>21</sup> Translation by Richard Mott Gummere taken from Seneca, *Moral letters to Lucilius* (Cambridge, MA: 1925).

Seneca describes the nature of the soul in wholly physical terms, likening it to a baby in a womb. As Paul Veyne puts it in the commentary to his edition of the letters, it describes a fundamentally Stoic dream that gives a purely physical explanation of the survival of the soul that, after leaving the body, escapes from the material mist to have a clearer view. That vision, however, is not a transcendental view of the truth but rather, as Veyne succinctly puts it, it is nothing more than a large panoramic view of the world, the view of an astronaut.<sup>22</sup> Taken out of its original context – which is exactly the way in which Huygens presents it to his reader – Seneca's citation fits in perfectly with the other quotes. But when we take the Stoic's concept of the materiality of the soul into account, the citation from Seneca's 102nd letter seems to be misplaced. Then what is it doing here?

The Stoic end of the consolation and of consolatory writing, as is well known, was to reach *apatheia*, the freedom of all perturbation, while the Judeo-Christian tradition advocated a view on grief that could be described as redemptive suffering. The Christian consolatory tradition begins with Paul's Epistles:

Moved by Paul's eloquent example and by the literary richness of the classical tradition, Greek and Roman Fathers cultivated a consolatory tradition that included the classical genres of the funeral oration, the letter, the treatise or dialogue on death, as well as the Christian genres of the sermon, the congregational letter, and the theological treatise.<sup>23</sup>

Jerome is an obvious example of this as two of the quotes Huygens included in his margins are derived from consolatory letters by the church father. Breaking with tradition, at least in part, was Augustine who 'opposed the Stoic notion of *apatheia*, favouring a Platonic and Peripatetic acceptance of emotional states'.<sup>24</sup> As George McClure puts it, Augustine replaced all the classical consolatory rhetoric by a simple vision of Grace.<sup>25</sup> In short, the difference between Seneca's Stoic approach to grief and Augustine's Christian reaction is that the Stoic attempts to control his emotions while Augustine wants to, or

<sup>22</sup> Seneca, *Oeuvres choisies: Entretiens. Lettres à Lucilius. Edition établie (avant-propos, préface, bibliographie, chronologie, introductions, notes) et traduction revue par Paul Veyne* (Paris: 1993) 996.

<sup>23</sup> McClure G.W., *Sorrow and Consolation in Italian Humanism* (Princeton: 1991) 11.

<sup>24</sup> McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation* 173 n. 43.

<sup>25</sup> McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation* 13.

even needs to, experience them. While Huygens clearly makes use of the Stoic form of the consolation, demanding a certain *apatheia* in Lucretia's acceptance of her blindness, as exemplified by the many Stoic *topoi* he makes use of, he combines this tradition with the Augustinian vision of Grace, contrasting Stoic form with Augustinian content. By incorporating a quotation by Seneca on the work of the soul, together with the Christian quotations, the text attempts to cover up the cognitive dissonance between its different sources of consolation. However, when considering the context they were taken from, the dissonance between the sources is highlighted rather than covered up.

*The mystical 'eye of the heart'*

Since the whole of Huygens' poem is riddled with implicit references to Augustine's ideas on mental vision as they appear in the church-father's letter that Huygens explicitly quotes, it is crucial to my argument here that we take a closer look at it. In this letter written by Augustine in 408 and addressed to a certain Lady Italica, the recently widowed member of a Roman patrician family, the bishop consoles his addressee with the loss of her husband, stating that he has passed on into 'that other life, in which [the deceased] shall be to us more beloved as they shall be better known'. The quote from this letter that accompanies line 83b reads: 'Truly that Light is God Himself, for God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all; but He is the Light of purified minds, not of these bodily eyes. And the mind shall then be, what meanwhile it is not, able to see that light. But this the bodily eye neither now is, nor shall then be, able to see'. Catalogued as Epistle 92, the letter contains many of the elements Margaret Miles described as typical of Augustine's 'theology of light' as it can be found in both his *Confessiones* and *De trinitate*.<sup>26</sup> It is that 'theology of light' that is reflected in the 'mystical' lines about the spiritual eye in *Ooghentroost*.

The reasoning behind Augustine's consolation in his letter to Italica is founded on Augustine's belief in, what Miles has called the 'primacy of divine illumination in any act of human understanding'.<sup>27</sup> In the

<sup>26</sup> All references to Augustine's letter are to Schaff P., *Prolegomena: St. Augustine's Life and Work, Confessions, Letters* (Buffalo, NY: 1887).

<sup>27</sup> Miles M., "Vision: The Eye of the Body and the Eye of the Mind in Saint Augustine's *De trinitate* and *Confessions*", *The Journal of Religion* 63, 2 (1983) 126.

next world, divine illumination will help us to see more clearly what was hitherto hidden from us. Since seeing, in Augustine's epistemology, is bound up with knowledge – just as faith is reached through hearing – the divine illumination that will help us to see more clearly will eventually aid us in knowing more fully. In the end, divine illumination will bring about the 'most satisfying fulfilment of human life', namely the *visio Dei*.<sup>28</sup> Seeing the Deity is the ultimate achievement of a pious life. It amounts to reaching a highly mystical transcendental state that could even be described as eternal life. Spiritual seeing in Augustine's theology is modelled on physical seeing because seeing which requires no physical contact between the seer and what is seen is regarded by Augustine as the highest of the senses. Vision is thus the sense 'most compatible with the rational life of the active soul'.<sup>29</sup> It is precisely through its rational capacities that the soul can climb up to God.

Augustine adopts his trajectory of mental vision from Neo-Platonism he took up from Plotinus. The Neo-Platonism in Augustine could be categorized as a type of reflection that could be called 'literary, mystical, and meditative' that complements rational thinking.<sup>30</sup> The impressions gained by the bodily senses are received by the passive soul. There, through the faculty of the inner sense, cognitive information can be retrieved from these sense impressions. Through the mediation of the inner sense and the participation of memory, the body can react appropriately in response to the sense impressions.<sup>31</sup> The inner sense in itself is not part of the rational soul, but rather renders sensory information in a way that it becomes intelligible. In that way it 'support[s] the higher rational operations of Platonic dialectics'.<sup>32</sup> It helps the rational soul perceive discrete objects (which is the Platonic operation of division) on the one hand and to combine the information collected by the different senses (the operation of synthesis) on the other hand. This faculty of the inner sense became known as the 'sixth sense' or as Augustine called it the 'eye of the mind'. The 'eye of the mind' thus provides the starting place for the rational soul's ascent

<sup>28</sup> Miles, "Vision: The Eye of the Body" 125.

<sup>29</sup> Vance E., "Seeing God: Augustine, Sensation, and the Mind's Eye", in Nichols S.G. – Kablitz A. – Calhoun A. (eds.), *Rethinking the Medieval Senses. Heritage Fascinations Frames* (Baltimore: 2008) 17.

<sup>30</sup> Stock, "Reading, Ethics, and the Literary Imagination" 6.

<sup>31</sup> Vance, "Seeing God: Augustine, Sensation, and the Mind's Eye" 18.

<sup>32</sup> Vance, "Seeing God: Augustine, Sensation, and the Mind's Eye" 18.

through reason. Such is the Neo-Platonic path of ascent that fuelled Augustine's conception of the *visio Dei*.

Augustine's model of mental seeing necessarily places emphasis on the necessity of man's effort in training his spiritual eyes. For Augustine seeing God is always a combination of Divine grace – the illumination that is needed to cross the final threshold of knowledge – and human effort.<sup>33</sup> One can easily imagine reading as being a form of active contemplation. There is active involvement of the inner eye when reading. What is read is conjured before the inner eye before it is committed to memory. In this way, I argue, reading can easily become a means to reach the *visio Dei*, a form of spiritual exercise that prepares the spiritual eyes for the beatific vision, always keeping in mind the necessity of Grace in achieving that end.

### *Reading and conversion*

In Augustine's *Confessions* the self is constituted through an internal reading, a rereading in fact, of the narrative of life's event in the memory. According to Brian Stock, Augustine has made an attempt to lay a theoretical foundation for establishing a reading culture.<sup>34</sup> He initiated a tradition in which reading (and by extension writing) comes to be seen as essential for a construction of the self. Self-awareness evolves from an awareness of the self as a reading subject. As Stock puts it:

One of the techniques for describing the self that evolves during the later ancient period involves the real or imagined use of reading and writing. The notion of the self thereby becomes interdependent with the subject's literary understanding.<sup>35</sup>

The most famous example of the use of this technique can of course be found in Augustine's own *Confessions*. The church father's autobiography can be more aptly described as the biography of a reader. As Carol Quillen has put it, reading figured prominently in the work of Augustine for its role in the representation of the self and its transformations. In the *Confessions*, each turning point in Augustine's life

<sup>33</sup> Miles, "Vision: The Eye of the Body" 126.

<sup>34</sup> Stock B., *Augustine the Reader* (Cambridge, MA – London: 1996) 1.

<sup>35</sup> Stock B., "Reading, Writing, and the Self: Petrarch and His Forerunners", *New Literary History* 26, 4 (1995) 717–730.

is characterized as a reading moment. He describes his reactions to certain texts as well as explicit moments of conversion in relation to the texts that seemed to trigger them. Central to his final conversion to Christianity is his acceptance of a drastic change in interpretative habits. Reading like a Christian means a turn to reading 'in the spirit' not 'in the letter'.<sup>36</sup>

Augustine's view on reading stands in direct relation to his view on the structure of human cognition and thought. He thinks of human cognition as an independent macrocosmic structure in which thought activates memory, intelligence and will.<sup>37</sup> Reading then, by stimulating thought, is a form of committing to memory. To Victoria Kahn, memory in Augustine serves as a divinely informed activity, collecting and ordering fragments of past experience into a coherent self thereby structuring the self into an orderly narration.<sup>38</sup> Reading in other words through the activation of memory coherently structures the self. In the *Confessions*, reading consists of two closely related movements – an upward and an inward move. Through the reading of an authoritative text – and only the Bible carries enough authority – the reader can reach transcendence. This sort of reading consists of three stages that are closely related to the Neo-Platonic trajectory of ascent described earlier: first there is the empirical activity of reading itself; secondly, there are the ensuing cognitive and interpretative processes; and, finally, there are meditations upon those processes.<sup>39</sup>

The transcendental double-move and the Augustinian trajectory of ascent can easily be traced in the lines of *Ooghentroost*. Line 61 reads: 'You and I have now finished reading the World', referring to the metaphor of the book of nature or the book of the word that was a quite common early-modern image, especially in the Netherlands.<sup>40</sup> Huygens is referring not only to the empirical activity of reading, using the verb 'uytgelesen' which means 'to have finished reading',

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<sup>36</sup> Quillen C.E., *Rereading the Renaissance. Petrarch, Augustine, and the Language of Humanism* (Ann Arbor: 2001) 46.

<sup>37</sup> Quillen, *Rereading the Renaissance* 85.

<sup>38</sup> Kahn V., *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance* (Ithaca – London: 1985) 157.

<sup>39</sup> Stock, *Augustine the Reader* 7.

<sup>40</sup> For more on this metaphor and its use in the Low Countries see: Blumenberg H., *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt* (Frankfurt am Main: 1981) and Jorink E., *Het Boeck der Natuer. Nederlandse geleerden en de wonderen van Gods Schepping 1575–1715* (Leiden: 2006). For Huygens' use of the metaphor see: Jorink E., 'Geef zicht aan de blinden'. *Constantijn Huygens, René Descartes en het Boek der Natuur* (Leiden: 2008).

but also to that of observing the world (literally it says 'reading the world'). In line 63 to 65 he suggests that they close that book (the book of nature) and then, in a rather obscure phrase, that they 'make their blind sermon, their eyeless contemplation, on the text that states "what is wisest for man is foolishness for God"'. The 'text' Huygens is referring to and upon which they should blindly contemplate is a passage from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: 'For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God; for it is written, "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness"' (1 Cor 3: 19).<sup>41</sup> The text admonishes Lucretia (and every other reader) first to leave behind the observation of the physical world, subsequently to take the authority of the Bible but leave behind its physical form (the Sermon should be blind) and to contemplate 'eyelessly' on that authoritative text. The blind sermon they should make is the cognitive interpretation. It will only last, however, until the eyeless contemplation is made. From physical text to interpretation, to meditation, in just four lines *Ooghentroost* paradoxically uses reading to leave the physical act of reading behind. Once this is established the real inward turn can take place.

The double movement, inward and upward, described by Stock as the essential result of reading in the *Confessions*, can be found in *Ooghentroost* as well. In line 67 the inward turn (that is concomitant with the meditation upon reading) is described (in line 67 'to see inward' and in line 77 'There, a different ray is pointed to something greater') as the result of the blindness that befalls Lucretia. However, it is not the inevitable result, as the majority of the lines is dedicated to convincing Lucretia of the necessity of that inward turn. Lucretia's physical blindness will not automatically entail that particular inward movement since that movement can only be described as the result of meditation on the Bible. However, her blindness will facilitate Lucretia's inward turn. Subsequently, Huygens describes the upward movement that ensues from the inward turn. In line 88, he refers to 'the eternal light', and in lines 119 and 120 he describes how the Christian can 'rise from light to light into the light of the Angels'.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> According to De Kruyter, the word 'Text' is an amphiboly and is used to mean both the world and the biblical verse that is included in the margins. De Kruyter C.W., *Constantijn Huygens' Oogentroost* 95. When we take into account that Huygens is admonishing Lucretia to close the book of the world, to turn away from the world, I do not believe this is a likely interpretation.

<sup>42</sup> 'Dees rijst van licht tot licht, in 'tdoncker, en voort aen / Tot in der Eng'len licht'.

In his study of the role of reading the Bible in English fundamentalism, *Burning to Read. English Fundamentalism and its Reformation Opponents*, James Simpson states that in Evangelical reading of Scripture, the reading in itself could not lead to reformed action. To the contrary, reading Scripture is 'designed only to promote the reader's humiliated recognition that satisfactory works are quite beyond the reader's grasp'.<sup>43</sup> The uselessness of works for Evangelical readers is the direct result of the concept of predestination; nothing can alter the outcome of the salvation that God has decided upon. While reading cannot offer any modes for change, since the reader is abject and incapable of imitating the model offered up by the Bible, it is still essential to an Evangelical reader that he read correctly.<sup>44</sup>

Paradoxically, in Lutheranism the idea of 'sola fides', upon which its theological foundation is built, is undercut by the primacy given to reading. The 'scriptura sola' that forms its counterpart points to a lack of faith rather than an adherence to faith alone. As was the case for Augustine, the Lutheran conversion is 'textual at every point' and ultimately rests upon the correct interpretation of a grammatical ambiguity in Scripture.<sup>45</sup> Once Luther had understood that the phrase 'iustitia Dei' (God's justice) should be understood not as an objective genitive (the justice of God) but rather as a subjective genitive that, in the words of Simpson, evacuates human standards 'to make way for the alien standard of the divine', i.e. the justice belonging wholly to God, the conversion is established.<sup>46</sup> So while the correct interpretation of Scripture is essential to a Lutheran or Evangelical theology, the reading itself can do nothing but provoke despair by offering up a model while simultaneously underlining that the reader cannot profit from the model.<sup>47</sup> It is precisely in this 'textual' despair that conversion and salvation lie.

We can again trace this emphasis on the uselessness of works and the primacy of reading for the *visio Dei* in the lines of *Ooghentroost* as well. In the half-line 83a, 'His soul is full of works' that I have already been referring to, the work of the soul is confronted with the uselessness ('vanity') of works on earth. Central in the work of the soul is

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<sup>43</sup> Simpson J., *Burning to Read. English Fundamentalism and its Reformation Opponents* (Cambridge, MA – London: 2007) 106.

<sup>44</sup> Simpson, *Burning to Read* 86.

<sup>45</sup> Simpson, *Burning to Read* 90.

<sup>46</sup> Simpson, *Burning to Read* 89.

<sup>47</sup> Simpson, *Burning to Read* 86.



the word in the middle of line 87: 'For the extraordinary favour that showed the bright day'. It is only through God's favour that the bright day of the eternal light can be seen. The grace of God is essential to the opening of the eye of the heart. The uselessness of works is reiterated in lines 105 and 106: 'They were tired of walking, lying and sitting, / Being uprooted, toiling, seeking, saying, seeing, knowing'.<sup>48</sup> While it is at first not clear who 'they' refers to, it becomes clear from line 117 that it refers to the blind heathens to whom, in spite of their efforts, 'the knowledge of their path is denied, still'.<sup>49</sup> Since only a true Christian can know his 'right to eternity of Father's inheritance in eternal eternity' (ll. 115–116), the outcome he is predestined for.<sup>50</sup>

The primacy of reading for the *visio Dei* is reiterated more indirectly. The last line of the poem reads 'the pious shall see God' (l. 1002).<sup>51</sup> Here again the line is accompanied by a quote from the work of Augustine, again from his 92nd letter: 'but when you read [*cum legis*, lg], "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," (Matthew 5:8) learn from it that the impious shall not see Him: for the impious are neither blessed nor pure in heart. Moreover, when you read, "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face," (1 Corinthians 13:12) learn from this that we shall then see Him face to face by the same means by which we now see Him through a glass darkly. In both cases alike, the vision of God belongs to the inner man'. Here again the primacy of reading Scripture and its role in seeing clearly is repeated. When in line 109, Huygens writes of the heathens; 'They had seen something, but vaguely', the reference to 1 Corinthians 13:12, is, although indirect, quite clear. Only when you read Scripture (*cum legis*) the fog seems to lift.<sup>52</sup>

According to Stock, reading was not the cause of Augustine's conversion but came to symbolize it in a new way. That might as well be the case for Huygens. Reading serves as a symbol of an 'awakened interiority'.<sup>53</sup> In this turn to inwardness, the Augustinianism in Huygens' lines meets the Stoicism. Bouwsma asserts that Stoicism could lead to a form of inwardness in which it comes very close to Augustinianism.

<sup>48</sup> 'Sy waren moe gegaen, gelegen en geseten, / Gewoelt, gewrocht, gesocht, geseit, gesien, geweten'.

<sup>49</sup> 'was haer 'tpad ontken'.

<sup>50</sup> 'recht ter heerlickheid / Van 's Vaders erffenis in eewigh'eewigheid'.

<sup>51</sup> 'de vromen sullen God sien'.

<sup>52</sup> 'Sy hadden yet gesien, maer schemerings gewijse'.

<sup>53</sup> Stock, *Augustine the Reader* 40–41.

This inwardness is the logical result of the individual pessimism that arose from Stoicism's cosmic optimism; since Man cannot change the cosmic order nor the effects it will have on his own life, all he can do is retreat to the inner world in which the impact of 'external causes' is limited and in which he is free.<sup>54</sup> In Stoicism virtue is the result of intellectual discipline, it is 'absorbed from books'.<sup>55</sup> Combined with the Stoic sovereignty of Reason reading can become the means to control the passions and is thus supremely suited to consolatory ends. In his argumentation Huygens veers between using the word 'Rede' (reason) and 'hert' (heart), seemingly applying them as synonyms. Augustinianism, however, freed the will from the Stoic obedience to Reason, in an effort to absolve God of the existence of evil, and placed emphasis on the heart and its affections (Man is free to follow his passions and thus to do evil) hereby requiring the introduction of divine Grace to save Man.<sup>56</sup> This could also be described as the Calvinistic outlook on reason and Grace.

So Huygens combines both points of view, emphasizing both reason's control over the passions (begot through the intellectual rigour of reading and desired outcome of the classical consolation) and the Augustinian and Calvinistic dependence on grace ('gunst') to illuminate the human heart ('menschen hert'). In this combination of the Stoic virtue-through-reading with the Augustinian movement towards conversion, the text can effectively become a written agent of conversion leading the reader to the insight that God alone can save. This tradition of meditative, contemplative reading (therapeutic and leading to conversion) provides an alternative for the exclusively Stoic consolatory tradition De Kruyter places Huygens in.

### *Conclusion: the humanist conflict*

In his analysis of the different philosophical lines of reasoning in Renaissance humanism, Bouwsma challenges the commonly accepted

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<sup>54</sup> Bouwsma, "The Two Faces of Humanism" 31. Yet in spite of this cosmic determinism Man should strive to self-improvement. For an introduction to the Stoic resolution of that paradox see: Frede D., "Stoic Determinism", in Inwood B. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (Cambridge: 2003).

<sup>55</sup> Bouwsma, "The Two Faces of Humanism" 22.

<sup>56</sup> Bouwsma, "The Two Faces of Humanism" 41.

notion that humanism involved the victory of Plato over the Scholastics' Aristotle. Because the Renaissance saw a revival of the importance of rhetoric—it was virtually absent from Hellenic philosophy (the Platonic and Peripatetic schools) but became one of the central concerns of Hellenistic philosophy (especially with the Neo-Platonics, Skeptics and Stoics)—Bouwsma argues that the most important sources of philosophical thinking in the Renaissance cannot be found in Hellenic, but in Hellenistic philosophy. A distinction is made to separate Greek (Hellenic) from Latin (Hellenistic) sources. About the importance of rhetoric for the Renaissance Bouwsma writes: '[R]hetoric [...] was [...] the vehicle of a set of basic intellectual conflicts crucial to the development of European culture in the early modern period'.<sup>57</sup> Reacting to the widely held idea that humanism is merely a matter of rhetoric rather than philosophy, he asserts that the preoccupation of the Renaissance with rhetoric was not a mere fixation on the formalities of discourse but the crux of the intellectual debate of the period. Bouwsma thus contends that instead of being centred on the conflict between Plato and Aristotle, humanism oscillated between Stoicism and Augustinianism as both had a strong rhetorical traditions. He refers to this oscillating movement as humanism's internal struggle because the two positions represent 'antithetical visions of human existence'.<sup>58</sup> While neither of the two can be regarded as a well-defined set of ideas, they present clearly and radically opposed worldviews. Stoicism, Bouwsma argues, rather than being a fixed set of beliefs, provided the humanists with a particular form, an eclecticism, which allowed the philosopher to incorporate different ideas from the various pagan schools. Augustinianism, on the other hand, represents a steady movement away from Hellenistic culture and toward a 'Christian vision of man and the human condition'.<sup>59</sup>

Of the two positions Stoicism was the more conservative, while Augustinianism provided man with more means for self-assertion.

[A]t the heart of Stoicism is that familiar cosmic optimism [the knowability of the world-order and Man's subservience to that order] which signifies, for the actual experience of men, the deepest pessimism. Against all this, Augustinianism, though by no means denying in principle the ultimate order of the universe, rejected its intelligibility and thus its

<sup>57</sup> Bouwsma, "The Two Faces of Humanism" 3.

<sup>58</sup> Bouwsma, "The Two Faces of Humanism" 4.

<sup>59</sup> Bouwsma, "The Two Faces of Humanism" 9.

coherence and its practical significance for man. The result was to free both man and society from their old bondage to cosmic principles, and to open up a secular vision of human existence [...]. In this sense Augustinianism provided a charter for human freedom and a release for the diverse possibilities of human creativity.<sup>60</sup>

Since in Augustinianism the order of the universe is unintelligible for man, it has no practical consequences on how he organizes his life. Paradoxically, however, Augustinianism relies heavily on dependence on God – on divine Grace – while man is self-sufficient for a Stoic. Furthermore, humanists with a strong affinity with Stoicism were, according to Bouwsma, less likely to become Protestants. However, neither of them were ‘in the Renaissance, primarily a function of the availability and transmission of literary sources’, as Bouwsma puts it. On the contrary, in their different ways, they both formed ‘responses to the deep and changing needs of Renaissance society and culture’: the need to self-assertion, the need to understand oneself and the world and the need to be able to change oneself in a new and changing world.<sup>61</sup>

I believe that, apart from offering Lucretia and every other blind reader individual solace, Huygens’ text, with its structural response to the conflicting worldview of Stoicism and Augustinianism, its strong reliance on rhetoric for achieving its consolatory and even conversational ends, and finally its odd mixture of two seemingly opposed genres, meets these early modern needs. It provides the reader with an Augustinian (Calvinistic) response to suffering and grief while simultaneously expressing a Stoic (humanist) trust in what rhetoric and literature can achieve. Because its creative response to the traditional generic codes of the consolation counterbalances the dependence on Grace for salvation that is the core of its Augustinian message, Huygens’ text gives us a deeper insight into the emergence of a new early-modern self-assertion. As the world changed and evolved toward greater social mobility, *Ooghentroost*’s rhetoric tries to offer its reader a different form of change, a mobility of self that results from a literary conversion.

<sup>60</sup> Bouwsma, “The Two Faces of Humanism” 12.

<sup>61</sup> Bouwsma, “The Two Faces of Humanism” 16.

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PART THREE

IMITATION





BETWEEN CONVERSION AND APOSTASY,  
MORIENS'S STRUGGLE AND THE FATE OF THE SOUL

John R. Decker

... forasmuch as man is rational is it necessary that man have a free-will.

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, *Prima Pars* 83:1

... return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, and if your end is good, that will be enough for salvation.

Heinrich Suso, *Wisdom's Watch Upon the Hours*

The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.

2 Peter 2:9

The *Death of Moriens* [Fig. 1], the last woodcut illustration in a mid-fifteenth-century version of the *Ars Moriendi* (*The Art of Dying Well*), depicts the moment at which a dying man named Moriens literally 'gives up the ghost'.<sup>1</sup> Moriens lays on his deathbed and, as his eyes begin to close, a lone attendant removes a still burning candle from his hand. Above him, an angel reaches out to receive the homunculus representing Moriens's *anima* (soul) as it is released at the instant of his death. The still-lit candle and the dead man's ascending spirit make it clear that the viewer witnesses the moment of Moriens's demise as it happens. All around the deceased man is a tumult of activity. To the right, a group of saints, including Mary Magdalene, the Virgin Mary, and John the Evangelist, gather around the crucified Christ. This tableau, along with the angelic reception of the soul, signals to the viewer that this man has died a 'good death' and can expect salvation rather than damnation. The group of demons writhing at the bottom of the composition makes Moriens's status as one of the elect even more clear. Not only do the imps surrounding his bed contort themselves

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<sup>1</sup> All Latin translations are mine unless noted. I take responsibility for any and all errors.

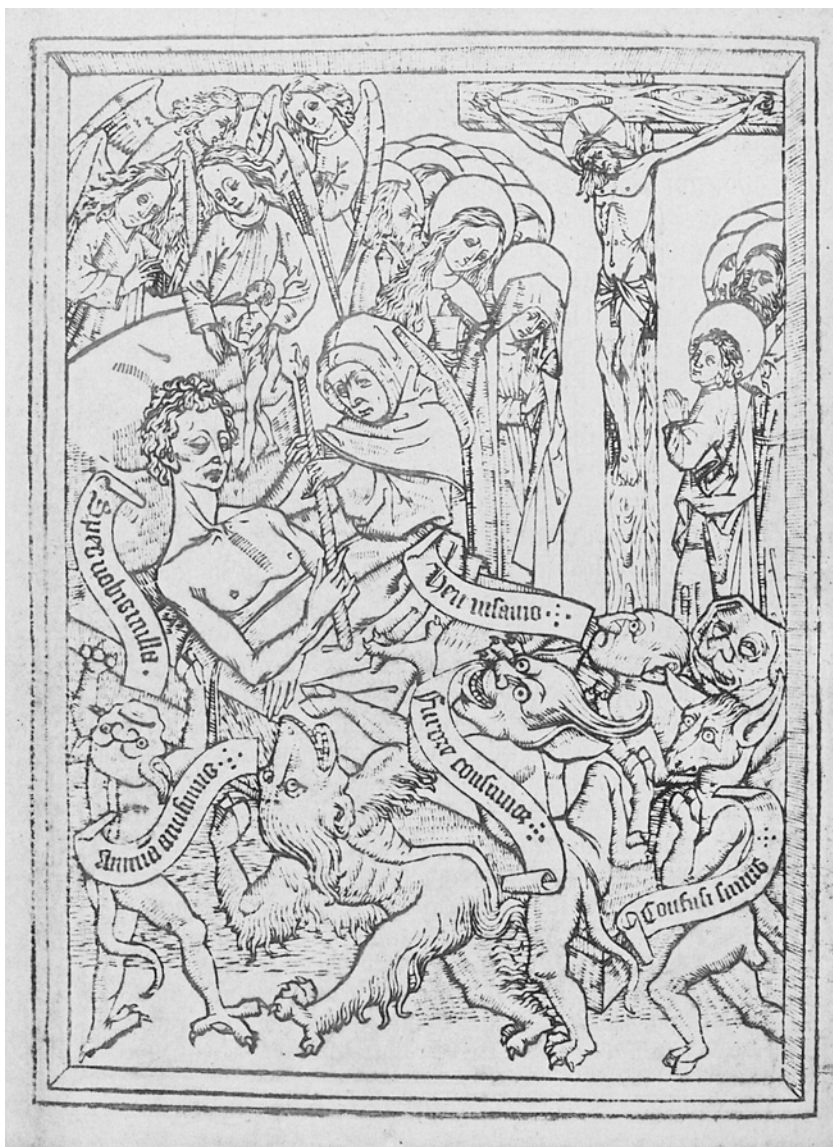


Fig. 1. Anonymous, "Death of Moriens", *Ars Moriendi* (1450), reproduced in *The Ars Moriendi* (editio princeps, ca. 1450). A reproduction of the copy in the British Museum, W.H. Rylands, ed. Printed for the Holbein Society (London: 1881). Image © The British Museum.

in frustration, which is in direct contrast to the more ordered bodies of Christ and his attendants above the deathbed, but the banderoles winding around them also give voice to their frustrations. These texts declare *confusi sumus* (we are confounded), *animam amisimus* (we have lost this soul), *furor consumor* (we are devoured by rage), *heu insanio* (alas, I have gone mad), and *spes nobis nulla* (our hopes have come to nothing) to signal the demons' absolute defeat. The soul they hoped to ensnare for themselves escapes their infernal grasp and ascends to receive its reward in heaven. For the faithful, this scene of spiritual triumph offers the hope that when the time comes, they too can pass through the trials of death and join the saints and angels in the glory of God's kingdom. Early modern Christians knew, however, that such a good outcome was by no means guaranteed, and Moriens's good death raised two related questions. First, how did he reach the point that his soul was acceptable to God? Second, how might rank-and-file Christians hope to join him?

The images and texts in the *Ars Moriendi* offer answers to both questions. A well-known handbook for preparing Christians for death, it provides guidelines that, if followed correctly, promise to increase a soul's chances of attaining heaven or, at the very least, of avoiding hell.<sup>2</sup> The *Ars Moriendi* was ubiquitous by the mid-to-late fifteenth century, and Christians had access to its teachings in a number of ways. The oldest form of the *Ars Moriendi* appeared in Latin and was directed toward priests who exercised pastoral care. The instructions contained in it provided the local vicar with a series of questions designed to test

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<sup>2</sup> The scholarship on the *Ars Moriendi* is rather extensive. For a good overview of it, see the following list, which is by no means exhaustive: Comper F. (ed.), *The Book of The Craft of Dying and other Early English Tracts Concerning Death* (New York, NY: 1977). (Reprint of the original edition by Longmans, Green, and Co.: London; – New York, NY, 1917); Ivins W., "The Museum Editions of the *Ars Moriendi*", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 18, 10, part 1 (1923) 230–236; O'Connor M., *The Art of Dying Well. The Development of the Ars Moriendi* (New York: 1942); Tenenti A., *La Vie et La Mort a travers l'Art du XV<sup>e</sup> Siecle* (Paris: 1952); Olds C., *Ars Moriendi: A Study of the Form and Content of Fifteenth-Century Illustrations of the Art of Dying* (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1966); Beaty N., *The Craft of Dying. A Study in the Literary Tradition of the Ars Moriendi in England* (New Haven, CT: 1970); Imhof A., *Ars Moriendi. Die Kunst des Sterbens einst und heute* (Cologne: 1991); and Scaramella P. – Tenenti A. (eds.), *Humana Fragilitas. The Theme of Death in Europe from the 13th Century to the 18th Century* (Clusone: 2002).

the dying person's orthodoxy and created an opportunity to address any faults discovered in the process. By the mid-fifteenth century, an abbreviated form appeared in which woodcut illustrations, chronicling Moriens's tribulations as he faces death, accompany Latin texts that distilled the main points from the longer, clerical version. These editions appear to have been destined for the market where the laity and the clergy could purchase a copy. As the *Ars Moriendi* gained in popularity, vernacular versions appeared all over Europe – both the long and abbreviated forms, sometimes with illustrations, sometimes without – offering all Christians access to the helpful information it contained. The abbreviated and vernacular versions shared a basic structure in common. During his death struggle, Moriens undergoes five pairs of temptations and inspirations: the temptation against faith, the inspiration to faith; the temptation to despair, the inspiration against despair; the temptation to impatience, the inspiration against impatience; the temptation to vainglory, the inspiration against vainglory; and finally the temptation of avarice, the inspiration against avarice. By following Moriens as he negotiates each pair of temptations and exhortations, the *Ars Moriendi* leads the viewer inexorably to the final woodcut, with which I began this paper, in which the dying man navigates his passage correctly and departs to his final reward. The implication for the faithful was that if each person diligently follows the advice given in the tract, he or she can share in Moriens's fate.

For early modern Christians, a ready-made roadmap for attaining the soul's deliverance would have been an attractive prospect indeed. Previous scholars, in fact, have discussed the text and images of the *Ars Moriendi* in terms of the Four Last Things (Death, Purgatory, Heaven, and Hell) and have linked them with the ever-present Christian desire for salvation.<sup>3</sup> This approach has provided valuable information about early modern concepts of death and dying, and has given scholars insight into contemporary psychology. It does

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to the sources listed in note 2, see also: Aries P., *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. H. Weaver (New York: 1981); Breure L., *Doodsbeleving en levenshouding. Een historisch-psychologische studie betreffende de Moderne Devotie in het IJsselgebied in de veertiende en vijftiende eeuw* (Hilversum: 1987); Binsky P., *Medieval Death. Ritual and Representation* (London: 1996); Bynum C. – Freedman P. (eds.), *Last Things. Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: 2000); and Hamm B., "Ars moriendi, Totenmemoria und Gregorsmesse; neue Nahdimensionen des Heiligen im ausgehenden Mittelalter", in *Das Bild der Erscheinung: die Gregorsmesse im Mittelalter* (Berlin: 2007) 304–354.

not, however, acknowledge the fundamental struggle played out in the images of Moriens, or the import of that battle on the daily lives of the faithful. In this paper, I argue that the images of Moriens in the *Ars Moriendi* are not simple depictions of early modern anxieties surrounding death. As a stand in for Everyman, Moriens enacts the critical moment in which the *liberum arbitrium* (free will) must choose between full conversion – accompanied by a restoration of the innermost self – and abandoning the soul to the apostasy of sin. For contemporary viewers, Moriens's changing condition throughout the series not only addressed generalized deathbed concerns, but it also confronted the faithful with the potential consequences of exercising the *liberum arbitrium* improperly in daily life. Moriens's struggle, as offered in the *Ars Moriendi*, drove home to Christians that the state of their souls was not certain and that proper conversion was the only way to address any lingering doubt. Further, Moriens's shifting lot in the series demonstrated that conversion and the purification of the soul that led to salvation were not one-time, static events, but ongoing, dynamic processes. The faithful understood that (re)conversion was a life-long prospect that required patience and effort, especially as they approached death. Contrary to modern scholarly assumptions, the Protestant doctrine of 'once saved, always saved' did not hold true for Moriens, or for the viewer who used the *Ars Moriendi* as a pattern book for a good death.

In order to explore these aspects of the *Ars Moriendi*, I investigate four of the eleven illustrations that make up the full pictorial cycle of the so-called *Editio Princeps* of 1450 housed in the British Museum.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, I analyze the temptation against faith, the inspiration to faith, the temptation to despair, and the inspiration against despair. I limit myself in this way for two reasons. First, the constraints of space prevent me from performing an in-depth analysis of all eleven woodcuts in the series. Second, and most importantly, late medieval theology considered the last three trials (impatience, vainglory, and avarice) to be subsets of desperation.<sup>5</sup> Understanding desperation, as well as its

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<sup>4</sup> I say so-called because it is impossible to know for certain whether or not this is indeed the first edition of this particular text. There may have been earlier versions that are now lost. I use *Editio Princeps* as a title rather than a type designation as a short-hand means of identifying this particular manuscript in the British Library.

<sup>5</sup> Snyder S., "The Left Hand of God: Despair in Medieval and Renaissance Tradition", *Studies in the Renaissance* 12 (1965) 18–59.

correlate, hope, will necessarily shed light on the remaining trials and will help situate all of them in the larger process of conversion. This is significant, as faith and hope are two of the three theological virtues necessary for salvation. The remaining virtue, charity, depended on the first two, and vice versa. As a result, the tract's *de facto* focus on the virtues of faith and hope had direct consequences for the soul's redemption. According to medieval theologians, a soul that had faith and hope would also have charity and would be worthy of saving; a soul lacking these virtues was damned.<sup>6</sup> The *Ars Moriendi* provided the faithful with a means of inculcating these virtues in themselves and, in doing so, helped them to fashion their souls in a manner that they hoped would be pleasing to God. Moriens's deathbed struggle cast the perfection of the soul, and the promise of salvation that flowed from that rectification, as a dynamic process of conversion.

Conversion (from *converto*) means to turn back, to reverse, and to transform.<sup>7</sup> For fifteenth-century Christians, conversion and its inverse, apostasy, always entailed movement toward or away from God or the devil. The dyad inherent in Christian ideas of good and evil created polarized destinations (heaven or hell) towards which every human soul journeyed while alive. The interrelatedness of conversion and apostasy meant that the soul automatically enacted a dual movement. To convert to a position meant becoming an apostate of its opposite. For the faithful, the ideal was to turn toward virtue and away from sin. In other words, converting to God meant becoming an apostate from the devil. This was not as simple as it seemed, however, as Christian belief held that humankind's fallen nature made it difficult, if not impossible, for the soul to choose the right path. Primordial sin introduced the possibility that Satan could invert the soul's ideal journey, making it a convert to him and an apostate from God. It was a fundamental tenet of soteriology (the theology of salvation) that without the intervention of grace, and Christ's sacrifice on the cross, all human souls would succumb to the devil's temptations.

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<sup>6</sup> Snyder, "The Left Hand of God" 49; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: 1927–1935), Aquinas T., *Summa Theologiae, Secunda Secundae Partis*: Question 23:2 and 6.

<sup>7</sup> In the Middle Ages, the term *conversion* often applied to entering monastic life but it still maintained its basic meaning of returning to God. See Kieckhefer R., "Convention and Conversion: Patterns in Late Medieval Piety", *Church History* 67, 1 (1998) 32–51; Morrison K., *Understanding Conversion* (Charlottesville: 1992).

Grace and Christ's death, though powerful spiritual medicines, did not automatically free Christians from the burden of sin, however. Fifteenth-century soteriology also taught that it was necessary for each soul to cooperate in its own salvation to whatever degree it was able. Theologians stressed that when the soul made a good faith effort to reach toward God, and away from Satan, it accrued merit. These merits were critical in offsetting the sins that threatened to condemn the soul to perdition or purgatory. Thomas Aquinas, for example, held that such merits were a fitting reward for the soul's work and derived from God's love and justice.<sup>8</sup> By the fifteenth century, churchmen – and the priests and vicars who relied on their teachings – held the idea of *facienti quod in se est dues non denegat gratiam* (if he does what is in him, God will not deny him grace) as axiomatic.<sup>9</sup> These concepts were not limited to theologians. The laity also understood the need to cooperate in their redemption and routinely made use of a wide array of aids. Christians turned to the intercession of the saints, the coredemptive powers of the Virgin, and promises of help and protection available through apotropaic images and objects in their daily struggles to turn away from sin and toward beatitude.<sup>10</sup> To some extent, the laity's desire to participate in their redemption derived from the work of theologians like Aquinas. To be sure, the abstract and difficult ideas propounded by learned churchmen were not the sole sources for the practices that the laity embraced. The lay movements that swept through Europe in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, for example, provided a framework for understanding and actualizing the concept of

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<sup>8</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, *Prima Pars* 114: 1. For a good overview of the theology of merit, see Lea C., *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church*, 2 vols. (London: 1896); McGrath A., *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: 1986); and Oberman H., *The Harvest of Medieval Theology. Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge, MA: 1963); Pelikan J., *The Christian Tradition. A History of the Development of Doctrine*, 5 vols. (Chicago: 1984).

<sup>9</sup> For an expanded look at the concept of *facienti quod in se est*, see Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*; McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*; and Decker J., *The Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen tot Sint Jans* (Aldershot: 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Brown P., *The Cult of Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: 1981); Winston-Allen A., *Stories of the Rose. The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: 1997); Knippenberg W.H.Th., *Devotionalia. Religieuze voorwerpen uit het katholieke leven*, 2 vols. (Eindhoven: 1985); and Decker J., "Practical Devotion.' Apotropaism and the Protection of the Soul", in Melion W. – Enenkel, K. (eds.) *The Authority of the Word: Reflecting on Image and Text in Northern Art, 1400–1700* (Leiden: forthcoming).

the soul's cooperation in its own redemption. These movements were not merely tools for 'trickle-down' theology, which is to say a slavish adoption of high theology by the laity. They offered arenas for negotiating ideas between theologians and average Christians.

The social, political, and religious upheavals caused in the wake of the Hundred Years' War (1336–1453), the Black Death (1348), and the Great Schism (1378–1415) were instrumental in creating conditions ripe for the rise of lay religious organizations. The everyday misery and privations caused by war, the mass deaths and confusion of the bubonic plague, with its apocalyptic overtones, and the near-total disintegration of the Church thanks to the internecine struggles of three opposing popes made it seem to the laity that they were living in the last days. Further, heretical sects like the Waldensians (1170s–1470s), the Wycliffites (1378–1428) and the Hussites (1415–1434), as well as scandals involving priests and monks (Simony, concubinage, etc.), cast doubts on the authority of the Papal See and the ability of the Church to care for the health of Christian souls. In response to these challenges to the religious status quo, popular preachers from the mendicant orders made their way through Christian Europe, spurring the populace to acts of public piety and to personal acts of contrition and conversion. The Dominican preacher Meister Eckhardt, for example, encouraged Christians to turn themselves toward God and become tools of the Almighty's will.<sup>11</sup> Jan Brugman, a Franciscan, taught his congregations the need for repentance and conversion.<sup>12</sup> The Mendicants were instrumental in establishing arch-orthodox observant communities as well as tertiary orders for the laity. Other lay groups like the Beguines, Beghards, and the Modern Devotion responded to perceived ecclesiastical corruption by living quasi-monastic lives dedicated to work and apostolic simplicity.<sup>13</sup> For the men and women

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<sup>11</sup> Kieckhefer R., "Meister Eckhardt's Conception of Union with God", *The Harvard Theological Review* 71, 3/4 (1978) 203–225.

<sup>12</sup> Van Dijk A., OFM (ed.), *Verspreide Sermoenen. Johannes Brugman* (Antwerp: 1948).

<sup>13</sup> Bailey M., "Religions Poverty, Mendicancy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages", *Church History* 72, 3 (2003) 457–483; Bynum C., "Fast, Feast, and Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women", *Representations* 11 (1985) 1–25; Koorn F., *Begijnhoven in Holland en Zeeland gedurende de Middeleeuwen* (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 1981); Neel C., "The Origins of the Beguines", *Signs* 14, 2 (1989) 321–341; Pearson A., "Personal Worship, Gender, and the Devotional Portrait Dip-tych", *Sixteenth Century Journal* 31, 1 (Spring 2000) 99–122; Post R.R., *The Modern Devotion* (Leiden: 1968); and Zeigler J., "The *curtis* beguinages in the Southern Low



living in these communities, the surest means of achieving salvation was through hard work and devotion. The Modern Devout preacher John Brinckerinck made this clear to the Windesheim congregation in his treatise on conversion:

Those who persist and endure to the end in faith will finally gain what they desire. But those who make no effort to work at it, who remain lying in their laziness and follow the movements of the flesh without any resistance from reason, are in a bad way. For all in this state will surely go to hell.<sup>14</sup>

Not everyone chose to enter religious life or to abide by the strict, self-imposed rules of the Beguines or the adherents of the Modern Devotion. This did not mean, however, that they placed no value on their redemption or that they failed to care for their souls.

The faithful believed that angelic and demonic forces took notice of, and participated in, the high-stakes enterprise of human salvation and damnation. The turning (and returning) of each soul held cosmic import. The most significant of the soul's potential turning points came at the moment of death, and Christians took great pains to see to the health of their souls at the end of their lives. Those able to do so not only called for the *viaticum* (the Host offered as part of the last rites), but they also swore out detailed wills and testaments in which they stipulated the steps they wanted taken to help gain their redemption. Testators called for everything from vigils, to the giving of alms, to the saying of specific masses (sometimes numbering in the hundreds or in perpetuity), to being buried in the habit of a monastic order that they had patronized, or that they felt had a particularly pious reputation.<sup>15</sup> Christians believed that a person could have a 'good' death or a 'bad' death and planned each detail of their passing in order to ensure the former and avoid the latter. The worst possible demise was the sudden or unexpected death in which there was no time at all to prepare. A soul caught in this manner was most certainly doomed to damnation. The

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Countries and art patronage: interpretation and historiography", *Bulletin de l'Institut historique belge de Rome* 57 (1987) 31–70.

<sup>14</sup> Engen, J. van (trans.), "John Brinckerinck on Conversion", in *Devotio Moderna, Basic Writings* (New York: 1988) 225.

<sup>15</sup> Strocchia S., "Remembering the Family: Women, Kin and Commemorative Masses in Renaissance Florence", *Renaissance Quarterly* 42, 4 (1989) 635–654; Eire C., *From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Cambridge: 1995); and DuBruck E. – Gusick B. (eds.), *Death and Dying in the Middle Ages* (New York: 1999).

person who died unshriven sank into the pit of hell under the weight of his own unconfessed sins, unable to turn away from them and back toward God. Not only did a bad death affect the deceased, it had the potential to affect the whole community. Popular belief held that those who died badly could carry on as ghosts who tormented the living.<sup>16</sup> A bad death need not cause instant damnation or the creation of angry spirits who wandered the world, however. A marginally bad death, one that was improperly prepared or badly performed, could result in the soul having to spend millennia in purgatory, where it experienced the pain and torments of its imperfectly cleansed sins. It was safer by far to increase one's chances of a good death by preparing as carefully and as completely for it as possible. The surest means of this was to turn the soul away from its sins and (re)orient it toward God.

The *Ars Moriendi* filled this need by providing a procedure designed to ensure that the soul was purified, orthodox in its beliefs, and directed toward heaven rather than toward hell. The tract addresses the fundamental anxiety Christians had about which direction their souls were headed by ending with Moriens's triumph. The ascension of his soul at the moment of his demise demonstrates that a good death is possible, as long as the faithful follow his example. The texts and illustrations in the *Ars Moriendi* make clear that Moriens succeeded because of the choices he made throughout his ordeal. Though procedural, the system offered in the tract did not guarantee redemption. The choices made by each soul at the time of death influenced the journey it took and, ultimately, determined the outcome it either enjoyed or suffered. On the one hand, the emphasis on personal choice was encouraging. It opened the possibility that anyone, no matter how reprobate, could change directions and win redemption – even at the moment of death – by making the right choices. On the other hand, personal choice was a double-edged sword. Not only did it make deathbed repentance possible, it also introduced the prospect that even a pious soul could make the wrong choice at the last moment and, potentially, doom itself to perdition. The soul's success or failure was not decided until the body

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<sup>16</sup> Caciola N., "Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual in Medieval Culture", *Past and Present* 152 (1996) 3–45; Caciola N., "Spirits Seeking Bodies: Death, Possession and Communal Memory in the Middle Ages", in Gorgon B. – Marshall P. (eds.), *The Place of the Dead in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: 2000) 66–86; and Caciola N., *Discerning Spirits. Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: 2003).

breathed its last. Choice was critical in the processes of death and redemption. It was a privilege and a burden that was only possible because humankind possessed free will.

Free will (*liberum arbitrium*) was a primordial gift that allowed humans to choose to pursue good or evil – to follow God or Satan. According to Aquinas, ‘the proper act of free will is choice: for we say that we have a free will because we can take one thing while refusing another; and this is to choose’.<sup>17</sup> For fifteenth-century Christians, the liberty to choose was not a simple matter. Humankind’s fall from grace and its expulsion from the Garden of Eden, each the result of an improper use of free will, stained every human soul with sin. Christian belief taught that before the Fall, the human soul naturally sought its joy and comfort solely in God.<sup>18</sup> After the Fall, the soul lost its way and could be lured into seeking its bliss elsewhere. Thanks to free will, the soul had the capacity to choose whatever it liked but, because it was distorted by sin, could not trust that its choices were reliable. Theologically, this state of affairs led to potentially dire consequences. Augustine, in his *City of God*, identified the correct and incorrect choices available to the free will as being the foundations of two metaphorical cities – one of the blessed and one of the damned. As a Church Father, Augustine’s ideas directly and indirectly influenced Christian discussions of good and evil as well as free will and predestination well into the sixteenth century. They shed light on the conundrum of freedom and choice and, as such, are worth closer inspection. In book 12, Augustine discusses the effects of choosing well and choosing poorly.

We must believe that the difference [between the blessed and the damned] had its origin in their wills and desires, the one sort persisting resolutely in that Good which is common to all – which for them is God himself – and in his eternity, truth, and love, while the others were delighted rather with their own power, as though they themselves were their own Good. Thus they have fallen away from that Supreme Good which is common to all, which brings felicity, and they have devoted themselves to their own ends. They have chosen pride in their own elevation... and so they have become arrogant, deceitful, and envious. The cause of the bliss of the others is their adherence to God; and so the cause of the misery of the apostates must be taken to be the exact contrary, their failure to adhere to him. Therefore the correct reply to the question, ‘Why are the

<sup>17</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, *Prima Pars* 83:3.

<sup>18</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, *Against the Pagans*, trans. H. Bettenson (London: 1984). See especially 11.17.

one sort happy?' is 'Because they cling to God'; and to 'Why are those others wretched?' the reply is, 'Because they do not cleave to him'.<sup>19</sup>

When the soul exercised its free will properly, it chose good and righteous things that led to God. Used improperly, free will allowed the soul to make disastrous choices that led it to misery. The conundrums facing Moriens throughout the *Ars Moriendi* thematize the choices each soul must make in daily life. Situating these choices in the context of preparing for death confronts the viewer with the importance of choosing wisely rather than foolishly. Careful, orthodox use of the free will was important as it operated within the context of *facienti quod in se est*. The choices each soul made demonstrated whether it was cooperating with God's plan of salvation or resisting it. In other words, each choice both signified and constructed one's inner conversion or apostasy. Like Moriens, each soul had to navigate a path toward conversion and salvation while avoiding their opposites. In the *Ars Moriendi*, this journey began with the inaugural pair of temptations and exhortations.

The first illustration in the *Ars Moriendi*, the *Diabolical Temptation Against Faith* [Fig. 2], shows the bedridden Moriens surrounded by human, celestial, and demonic visitors. Behind the bed, hidden from view by the headboard and by a sheet that an imp pulls upward, God, Christ, and the Virgin look on as various fiends torment the dying man. At the left of the composition, three figures stand in conversation. Near them, at the lower left corner of the image, a king and queen kneel in worship before an idol perched on a column. In the lower right corner, a female flagellant, stripped to her waist, stands near a man who draws a knife across his own throat. The demons in attendance gesture toward these groups and the banderoles near them make the viewer privy to their conversation with Moriens. Like the title of the text paired with this image, *Temptacio dyaboli de fide* (*Diabolical Temptation Against Faith*), the illustration makes clear that the fiends visiting the dying man present him with challenges to his faith. Moriens must exercise his free will and either accept or reject their lies. The orthodoxy of his choices determines whether or not he will overcome the temptations the devils pose.

At the top left corner of the image, a demon floats in mid-air and points toward the idolatrous king and queen. His banderole announces

<sup>19</sup> Augustine, *City of God* 12.1 (p. 471).

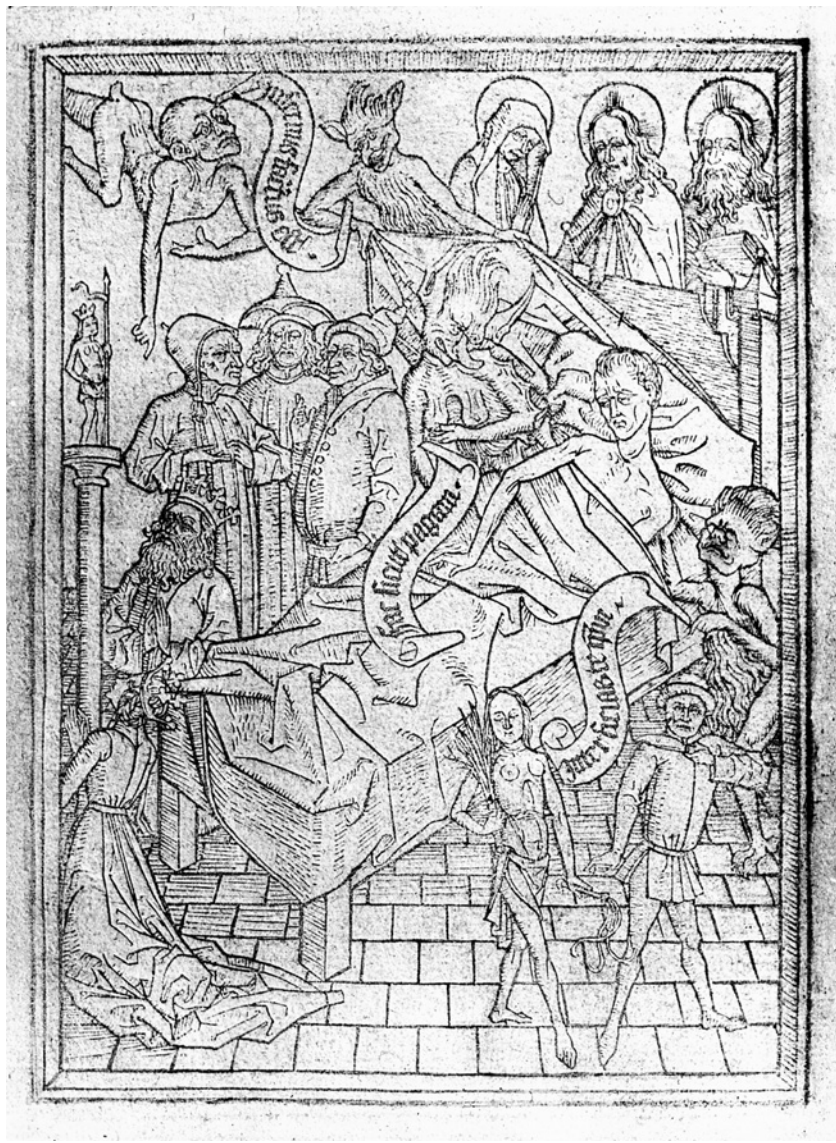


Fig. 2. Anonymous, "Diabolical Temptation Against Faith", *Ars Moriendi* (1450), reproduced in *The Ars Moriendi* (editio princeps, ca. 1450). A reproduction of the copy in the British Museum, W.H. Rylands, ed. Printed for the Holbein Society (London: 1881). Image © The British Museum.

*infernus factus est* (it is damned), indicating that worshipping idols, and by extension any errant action, is a false practice and leads to perdition. Next to Moriens stands a demon with sagging breasts who gestures toward the trio to her right. Her banderole reads *fac sicut pagani* (do as the pagans), indicating that these men represent unbelievers. Based on their headgear, especially that of the middle figure, they likely represent Jews.<sup>20</sup> For fifteenth-century Christians, Jews were the most visible and best-known class of unbelievers in everyday society. They denied that Christ was the Messiah and doubted fundamental tenets of Christian belief such as the doctrine of original sin.<sup>21</sup> Long-held anti-Semitic sentiment maintained that Jews, as pagan agents of evil, were guilty of the ritual murder of children and the desecration of the Host.<sup>22</sup> Ecclesiastical authorities considered *conversos* (Jews converted to Christianity) to be untrustworthy and constantly suspected them of secretly backsliding into apostasy.<sup>23</sup> Like the king and queen near them, these figures represent the truly reprobate. The positions of the trio and the royal couple, between the banderoles announcing that their actions are both damned and pagan, makes this clear. The last pair of figures, at the right, adds flagellants and suicides to the

<sup>20</sup> The central figure of this triad, for instance, wears a hat similar to that worn by Julian the Apostate in Geertgen tot Sint Jans's *Finding of the Bones of St. John the Baptist*. Such 'orientalizing' features were a common means for early modern and medieval artists to denote cultural 'others' like Jews. Rylands (*Ars Moriendi*, 1450 p. 9) claims that these figures are doctors discussing Moriens's physical state. He bases his assumption on a French version that provides the text *infirmus factus est*. He then claims that the demon nearest Moriens, whose banderole reads *fac sicut pagani*, points toward the king and queen worshipping the idol. The proximity and clarity of the gestures makes this reading untenable in my opinion. The uppermost demon points directly downward, toward the idol; the demon with sagging breasts stands directly next to the men in question. Further, as I have noted above, the headwear of the central figure in the standing trio is decidedly orientalizing. Last, the text of the *Ars Moriendi* (especially in the vernacular versions) notes that medical doctors must first see to the soul's health before treating the body. They are supposed to be part of the process of spiritual reconciliation, not part of the problem. Positing the doctors as agents of Moriens's undoing makes little sense in the larger context of the *Ars Moriendi* tradition. As a result, I respectfully reject Rylands's conclusion.

<sup>21</sup> Rembaum J., "Medieval Jewish Criticism of the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin", *American Jewish Society Review* 7 (1982) 353–382.

<sup>22</sup> McCulloh J., "Jewish Ritual Murder: William of Norwich, Thomas of Monmouth, and the Early Dissemination of the Myth", *Speculum* 72, 3 (July 1997) 698–740; Ocker C., "Ritual Murder and the Subjectivity of Christ: A Choice in Medieval Christianity", *The Harvard Theological Review* 91, 2 (1998) 153–192; and Bynum C., "The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages", *Church History* 71, 4 (2002) 685–714.

<sup>23</sup> Stow K., "Conversion, Apostasy, and Apprehensiveness: Emicho of Floheim and the Fear of Jews in the Twelfth Century", *Speculum* 76, 4 (2001) 911–933.

ranks of those who are guilty of incorrect belief and action. The demon standing behind them seeks to draw Moriens's attention to them by jostling the dying man's shoulder. The banderole for this grouping reads *interfecias te ipsum* (kill thyself). These sinners perform particularly pernicious errors, based in obduracy and contumacy, and harm themselves physically and spiritually.

Originally an ad hoc group of lay people, the Flagellant Movement began in the 1340s in response to the bubonic plague. It spread throughout Europe, reaching from Italy to Scandinavia, bringing with it a stringent set of practices designed to appease God and expunge personal and communal sin. The Church expressed concerns regarding the sect's orthodoxy as early as 1349 and by the fifteenth century openly branded the movement a heresy.<sup>24</sup> Papal condemnation of the Flagellants stemmed from the group's unwillingness to submit to ecclesiastical authority on matters of doctrine such as penance and the role of the Church in the soul's salvation. As a banned cult, it was unlawful for any Christian to participate in its rites or activities. Anyone adhering to the sect, and practicing its tenets, was in contempt of Church law (as well as orthodoxy) and was guilty of contumacy, which was grounds for excommunication.<sup>25</sup> Further, willful persistence in heretical behavior demonstrated that the sinner was unwilling to change his opinion and was therefore guilty of obduracy. Such 'hardness of heart' meant that the sinner was unlikely to understand the nature of his error, experience contrition for his faults, and repent his sins. As such, it was extremely unlikely that an obdurate soul would convert to God and gain salvation. The suicide accompanying the flagellant is guilty of similar faults. Not only was self-murder against Church law (it was a mortal sin), it also robbed the suicide of the opportunity to repent his actions. As a result, the man depicted in the image is both contumacious and obdurate.

The demon's remark 'kill thyself' refers to the suicide and the flagellant equally. In both cases, each sinner kills his or her soul and becomes an apostate by turning away from God's will and Church

<sup>24</sup> Leah C., *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, 3 vols. (London: 1922) vol. 2, 380–384. Leah notes, for example, that Jean Gerson helped continue the condemnation while he was a delegate at the Council of Constance. This is intriguing, as many scholars (especially O'Connor in *The Art of Dying Well*) posit Gerson, or someone in his circle, as the likely author of the Latin *Ars Moriendi* text.

<sup>25</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, *Supplementum Tertiae Partis* 24:2.

law. In his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas defined apostasy in terms of withdrawing from faith. As an arch-orthodox Church doctor, Aquinas's *Summa* exercised a great deal of influence on doctrinal discussions. Those charged with parish-level pastoral duties had access to Aquinas's ideas, either through Latin sources and glosses or through vernacular paraphrases of them, and likely would have based their own catechetical teachings on them.

Apostasy denotes a backsliding from God. This may happen in various ways according to the different kinds of union between man and God. For, in the first place, man is united to God by faith; secondly, by having his will duly submissive in obeying His commandments...a man may...apostatize from God, by rebelling in his mind against the Divine commandments: and though man may apostatize...he may still remain united to God by faith. But if he give up the faith, then he seems to turn away from God altogether: and consequently, apostasy simply and absolutely is that whereby a man withdraws from the faith, and is called 'apostasy of perfidy'. In this way apostasy, simply so called, pertains to unbelief.<sup>26</sup>

Like the Jews and idolatrous nobles, the flagellant and the suicide do not submit themselves to orthodox Christian teachings and, therefore, are unbelievers. As such, they turn away from the accepted faith and toward degeneracy and perfidy. All of the mortals present at Moriens's deathbed function as spiritual 'others' and provide negative exemplars for both the dying man and the viewer. The image reifies orthodox Christian identity in terms of underlying dyads – believer/heretic, saved/damned, obedient/disobedient, faithful/apostate – and confronts the viewer with various groups who choose to turn away from God and toward the devil. Each figure in these three groups, as well as the groupings themselves, demonstrates a faulty use of free will and the incorrect choices that result. These spiritual others are damned because they have fallen from the path of faith.

Each group does not necessarily tempt Moriens to participate in its specific error. The groups, instead, raise the possibility that the dying man has fallen into his own error and is knowingly or unknowingly like them. The fiends require Moriens, and the viewer, to search his soul and find any evidence of contemporary analogues to the sins depicted. Idolatry need not be the worship of false idols. It, instead,

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<sup>26</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, *Secunda Secundae Partis* 12:1.



could include loving any material thing more than God. Acting like a pagan did not necessarily mean conducting false rituals or converting to Islam or Judaism. Usury (demanding interest on loans), which was becoming more prevalent among the Christian merchant classes in this period, might fall under the category of 'pagan acts' because it was contrary to Church teaching. Further, Christians associated money-lending and usury with Jews, who had carried out these activities for generations. Obduracy and contumacy were not limited to flagellants and suicides. Any Christian who hardened his heart to God's word or resisted submitting to God's will was guilty of these offences.

The image also questions whether Moriens, and the viewer, will be able to remain steadfast in his faith as death approaches or will turn away from it in favor of sin. Faith was the foundation of belief and, as Aquinas notes, without belief the soul becomes an apostate. The Latin text in the *Editio Princeps* echoes this sentiment: 'Demons work in these and other ways to turn man away from his faith when he is at his end because they well know that if you ruin the foundation, you necessarily ruin the building atop it'.<sup>27</sup> This idea was not limited to the Latin text, or to learned Churchmen like Aquinas. Vernacular *Ars Moriendi* tracts also emphasized the primacy of faith in the process of conversion and salvation. An early sixteenth-century Dutch version of the *Ars Moriendi*, titled *Een scone leeringe om salich te sterven* (*A good lesson on how to die well*), provides a good example. Like other vernacular forms of the *Ars Moriendi*, the Dutch tract adopts the language used in the Latin text and amplifies it with further explication. For the author of *Een scone leeringe*, 'faith is the foundation of blessedness...because, otherwise, as soon as [the dying man] begins to doubt any of [the articles of faith], he thus falls from the path of life and blessedness'.<sup>28</sup> For Moriens's conversion to be complete, he must turn away from anything that would weaken his faith and destroy his spiritual foundation.

In the second illustration, *The Angelic Inspiration to Faith* [Fig. 3], the celestial court appears to the dying man and drives away the demons who attempt to destroy him by inculcating disbelief. Angels and saints offer Moriens the comforts of faith and the reassurance that

<sup>27</sup> Rylands, *Ars Moriendi*; Tenenti, *La Vie Et La Mort* 100.

<sup>28</sup> Geus B. de – Heijden J. van der – Maat A. – Ouden D. den (eds.), *Een scone leeringe om salich te sterven* (Utrecht: 1985) 42.



Fig. 3. Anonymous, "Angelic Inspiration to Faith", *Ars Moriendi* (1450), reproduced in *The Ars Moriendi* (editio princeps, ca. 1450). A reproduction of the copy in the British Museum, W.H. Rylands, ed. Printed for the Holbein Society (London: 1881). Image © The British Museum.

if he turns toward God and away from the demons who taunt him, he will persevere. At the left of the image, God, Christ, the Virgin, Moses, and a host of saints stand vigil over the dying man. To the right, an angel addresses Moriens as three demons cower in the presence of the angelic retinue. Like the illustration for the *Diabolical Temptation Against Faith*, banderoles help tell the story. The angel at the right addresses Moriens, saying *Sis firmus in fide* (be firm in faith), which comforts the dying man. This admonition breaks the demons' hold on Moriens, which they declare in their banderoles: *Victi sumus* (we are beaten), *Frustra laboravimus* (our labors are in vain), and *Fugiamus* (we flee). In this image, Moriens undergoes a change in state. He shifts from being agitated to being calm, which is evident when we compare his posture with that of the previous illustration. In the *Diabolical Temptation Against Faith*, the artist renders Moriens's body as a series of harsh angles. His right arm and hand, which lie outside the sheet covering him and respond to the demons who taunt him, roughly form a reversed Z shape. The angularity of his arm and hand correspond with similar angles used to create the gestures that the demons, pagans, idolaters, and heretics make. In *The Angelic Inspiration to Faith*, the dying man lies completely beneath his sheets and makes no visible gesture as he listens to the angel. Further, the strong vertical forms of the celestial court and the angelic messenger stand in sharp contrast to the demons' distorted bodies. God and his retinue are orderly and calm; the imps who flee are chaotic and distressed. Moriens mirrors the saints and angels rather than the demons.

The change in Moriens and the difference between the angelic and diabolical hosts in each temptation/inspiration pairing is important. For the faithful, Moriens's tranquility or distress was more than a sign of his physical comfort or discomfort as he died. Each state was an index of the peril or safety his soul experienced during his struggle. Early modern Christians believed that the body could reflect one's inner condition. In the case of demonic temptation, and possible possession, this was especially telling. Bodies under demonic influence showed signs of distress and agitation; those free of diabolical forces did not.<sup>29</sup> Displays of distress not only testified to the potential presence of an unclean spirit, they also cast doubt on the sufferer's innocence. For the faithful, the agony caused by demonic inhabitation was often

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<sup>29</sup> Caciola, "Spirits Seeking Bodies"; and Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*.

a signal that the affected person had consented to sin and thereby had invited the fiend who tormented him into his body.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the sinner was afflicted because he had exercised his free will improperly. He turned toward the devil and away from God and, as a result, his suffering was a preliminary punishment for his apostasy. Not only did such suffering demonstrate the individual's error, and encourage him to stop sinning, it also made that error clear to the community as well. All Christians needed to discern between good and evil and exercise their free wills properly if they wanted redemption.

In the context of the *Ars Moriendi*, the issue of the soul's consent was a crucial component in determining to which side it would become a convert and which side an apostate. The angelic imperative to be firm in faith reminds Moriens, and the viewer, that the choice to remain steadfast in belief is a potent antidote to demonic hectoring. No matter how often the fiends try to lead him astray, Moriens will triumph as long as he disciplines his free will by following the examples of the saints. The Latin and vernacular versions of the tract make it clear that no one can sin and move away from God without consenting to do so. In the text accompanying the *Diabolical Temptation Against Faith* in the *Editio Princeps*, the author claims that 'devils cannot force men into any temptation nor can they prevail in any way without his consent, nor induce him to desire or consent to that which above all is dangerous, so long as he has use of his reason'.<sup>31</sup> In the text of *Een scone leeringe*, the tract writer remarks that 'it is known without a doubt that the enemy [Satan], in no way, has power to threaten a man [during his deathbed temptations] so long as the man has use of his mind and reason, [and] unless he give consent to it with his free will'.<sup>32</sup> The devil was unable to force anyone who was in control of his reason to sin. Reason guided the free will and if a Christian fell into error it was because he chose to do so. Each sin – each decision to move toward evil and away from good – demonstrated that the soul chose to disobey God. Such disobedience tacitly doubted, or discounted, the justice of God's commandments and was a form of unbelief. Every sin, therefore, marked a moment of apostasy from God and conversion

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<sup>30</sup> In the Middle Ages and early modern period, Christians believed that only God, in the form of the Holy Spirit, could enter a person's soul. Demonic possessions took place in the body, usually in the voids of the bowels. See Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*.

<sup>31</sup> Rylands, *Ars Moriendi*; Tenenti, *La Vie et La Mort* 100.

<sup>32</sup> De Geus (ed.), *Een scone leeringe* 42.

toward the devil. Such breaks in faith could have dire consequences. The author of the *Editio Princeps*, for example, instructed Christians that 'as soon as the infirm feel tempted against faith, they must first know that faith is necessary because without it, no salvation is possible'. The soul that chooses sin, de facto chooses damnation. Assurances that the devil could not force anyone to sin without the consent of his free will offered Christians little comfort. The Church taught that primordial sin deformed free will and made its judgments unreliable. Despite a soul's best efforts, it could (and likely would) choose badly and place itself in danger. Sin was inevitable while one lived and the realization of its inevitability presented another problem: it threatened to drive the soul into despair, which theologically was more deadly than unbelief.<sup>33</sup>

The third illustration in the *Editio Princeps*, the *Diabolic Temptation to Despair* [Fig. 4], introduces this particular danger. Unlike the *Diabolical Temptation Against Faith*, the image shows the dying man bereft of any celestial attendants; he must face his greatest temptation alone. Once again an assortment of demons and humans surround Moriens in his sick bed. Six fiends draw the dying man's attention to five figures and an inscribed tablet. As with the previous scenes in the *Editio Princeps*, the fiends in this tableau 'speak' via banderoles. A dog-eared demon in the upper left quadrant of the image makes clear that each of the imps assembled around Moriens's deathbed are there to uncover all the dying man's sins, no matter how hidden they might be. The fiend points toward the tablet it holds and commands Moriens to *Ecce peccata tua* (behold your sins). This temptation is a follow-up to the challenge to Moriens's faith and relies on an act of self-judgment in which the dying man must recognize his shortcomings and understand the serious consequences of his sins. The demons confront Moriens with the depths of his depravity and try to undermine his hope in order to lead him away from redemption and toward complete damnation. Despair was a stumbling block to conversion. As Aquinas put it, 'despair consists in a man ceasing to hope for a share of God's Goodness. [Because] when hope is given up, men rush headlong into sin, and are drawn away from good works'.<sup>34</sup> A soul in despair feared that its sins were so grave that forgiveness and redemption were

<sup>33</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, *Secunda Secundae Partis* 20:3.

<sup>34</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, *Secunda Secundae Partis* 20:3.



Fig. 4. Anonymous, "Diabolic temptation to Despair", *Ars Moriendi* (1450), reproduced in *The Ars Moriendi* (editio princeps, ca. 1450). A reproduction of the copy in the British Museum, W.H. Rylands, ed. Printed for the Holbein Society (London: 1881). Image © The British Museum.

no longer possible. As a result of its despondency, the soul wallowed in the apostasy of sin rather than turning toward God.

At the bottom of the composition, another dog-eared demon points to a seated figure, clad only in a loose-fitting shirt, and declares *Avare vixisti* (you have lived selfishly). The jagged edges of the shirt indicate that the garment is in ill repair and shows that the man wearing it is impoverished. Clearly, he has not been living selfishly, but Moriens has. The dying man's greed and indifference have reduced this man to his sorry state. The pauper's presence in the image associates Moriens's sin with the parable of Lazarus and Dives (Luke 16:19–31), which early modern Christians knew well. In the story, Lazarus is a poor man who begs the rich man Dives for succor. Dives denies the request and leaves Lazarus to suffer. At their deaths, poor Lazarus ascends to Abraham's bosom while wealthy Dives suffers punishment in hell for his greed and apathy. In the context of the temptation to despair, the demon offers Moriens's alleged similarity to Dives as an affirmation that he is already destined for hell.

Next to the pauper, a reclining man looks upward at the demon standing over him. The demon brandishes a sword in its left hand and points toward its prey with its right. The banderole accompanying these figures reads *Occidisti* (you have murdered) and accuses Moriens of having taken the life of another. At the bottom left of the scene, a demon mutely gestures to a stripped man seated at its feet. In its left hand the fiend holds the garment the man was wearing and in its right hand it holds a money sack. The illustration does not name the crime specifically and it is uncertain to what it refers. It may be a stand-in for some unnamed crime known only to the deceased or, more likely, it accuses Moriens of theft or robbery. If it is the latter, it may also be a proleptic reference to the text accompanying the inspiration against despair, which holds out the hope of redemption for various sins, including robberies. I argue that the stripped man refers to the crimes of theft or robbery, or to exploitation and violation in general, and that the two human figures nearest the dying man, as well as the pauper and murdered man, reinforce this reading.

At the top of the image, a man and woman stand near the head of Moriens's bed while two demons gesture to them. The demon nearest the dying man points to the woman and announces *Fornicatus es* (you are a fornicator). The second demon, standing between the living man and the woman, grasps the woman's hand and points to the man next to her. This fiend's banderole states *Periurus es* (you are an

oath breaker). While the demon's dual gesture appears only to refer to the woman, its gaze and its companion's accusation of fornication draw Moriens into the crime at hand. The woman is an adulteress and Moriens stands accused of being an adulterer with her. The demons indict both Moriens and his lover for exercising their free wills incorrectly and for choosing fornication rather than sexual continence.<sup>35</sup> She has broken her oath to her husband, and Moriens has not only broken the marriage oath to his own wife, but he has also been instrumental in breaking the oath between his paramour and her husband. Foreswearing an oath was a form of apostasy. The person breaking the oath turned away from fulfilling his or her promises and became a perjurer. The Church held that perjurers, especially of promissory oaths like marriage, were guilty of a mortal sin because all perjury was a sign of contempt for God.<sup>36</sup> In addition to the mortal sins of fornication and oath-breaking, the demons accuse Moriens and his lover of the underlying transgression of adultery. Theologians considered marital infidelity a mortal sin because it was a malicious violation of one's neighbor.<sup>37</sup> Further, the Church considered adultery a form of theft (if performed in secret) or robbery (if performed in public) because an adulterer took a man's wife from him without his consent.<sup>38</sup> In the context of the charges of adultery, selfishness, and murder announced in the demons' banderoles, it is reasonable to view the stripped man as a generic reference to theft or robbery. Each named crime is a form of taking something or depriving someone of something – be it a spouse, goods, charity, or life. The image displays a rogue's gallery of mortal sins, all freely chosen, each of which was guaranteed to kill the soul and damn it to hell.

In response to the demons' attempts to drive Moriens into the pit of despair, the *Angelic Inspiration Against Despair* [Fig. 5] offers the dying man a reason for hope. A messenger angel appears to Moriens

<sup>35</sup> Lansing C., "Gender and Civic Authority: Sexual Control in a Medieval Italian Town", *Journal of Social History* 31, 1 (1997) 33–59. Lansing, 47, notes that 'In canon law, adultery was understood as a mental sin, an act of will'.

<sup>36</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, *Secunda Secundae Partis* 98:3; in *Secunda Secundae Partis* 89:1 Aquinas defines a promissory oath as a promise in which 'God is called to witness in confirmation of something future'. In *Secunda Secundae Partis* 89:7, he states, 'the oath that is made about something to be done by us, the obligation falls on the thing guaranteed by oath. For a man is bound to make true what he has sworn, else his oath lacks truth'.

<sup>37</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, *Prima Secundae Partis* 88:2.

<sup>38</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, *Secunda Secundae Partis* 61:3.





Fig. 5. Anonymous, "Angelic Inspiration Against Despair", *Ars Moriendi* (1450), reproduced in *The Ars Moriendi* (editio princeps, ca. 1450). A reproduction of the copy in the British Museum, W.H. Rylands, ed. Printed for the Holbein Society (London: 1881). Image © The British Museum.

and brings with it a vision of four saints who offer a defense against the demonic attacks pictured in the previous illustration. The angel signals its mission of encouragement by telling the dying man *Nequaquam desperes* (do not give up hope). As an indication of the aid the angel and the saints offer, their presence drives away the demons who had been torturing Moriens. Two imps, at the lower right, scamper away. One hides under the bed and the other declares *Victoria mihi nulla* (my victory is for naught). In the previous illustration, the *Demonic Temptation to Despair*, Satan's minions paint Moriens as an inveterate sinner whose crimes include multiple mortal sins, each of which is worthy of damnation. As an antidote to the despair caused by the dying man's murder, thievery, fornication, and wanton apostasy, the angel brings him examples of those who sinned in a similar manner and yet found redemption through conversion.

At the foot of the bed, Saul of Tarsus straddles his fallen horse as rays of light stream toward him from heaven. This moment marks the beginning of his spiritual transformation into the Apostle Paul. Before his conversion, Saul persecuted the Church and was instrumental in martyring Christians. Though a murderer of the faithful and an unbeliever, God extended grace and mercy to Saul and made possible his redemption. Near Saul/Paul, St. Dismas hangs on a cross. In the late medieval tradition, Dismas was the so-called 'good thief' who died next to Christ during the Crucifixion. According to the Gospel accounts (Matthew 27:38; Mark 15:27–28; Luke 23:33, 39–43; and John 19:18) two thieves hung next to Christ on Golgotha. One denied Christ's divinity and the possibility of salvation, the other accepted Christ, professed his faith, and received assurance that he was saved. Despite a lifetime of theft and robbery, Dismas wins redemption by converting at the hour of his death. Next to Dismas stands Mary Magdalene. According to popular belief, the Magdalene was a prostitute who, on hearing Christ's message of redemption, repented her former life of fornication and followed the Messiah. The last saint, St. Peter, stands near Moriens and holds aloft his codex and the papal keys. To his left, a rooster sits atop the headboard of the dying man's bed. The rooster makes reference to an episode from Christ's Passion in which Peter denied knowing Christ and abjured being an apostle not once, but three times (Matthew 26:58–75, Mark 14:54–72, Luke 22:54–62, and John 18:15–27). He was an apostate of the worst kind: he knew Christ's divinity firsthand but turned away from that knowledge. Ashamed of his cowardice, Peter repented his error and received forgiveness at the

moment of his reconversion. Each of these saints provided examples of sinners guilty of the worst crimes. God's grace and mercy, however, allowed each one to turn away from evil and toward good.

For Moriens, and contemporary viewers, Paul, Dismas, Mary Magdalene, and Peter held out the hope that no matter how grave one's sins, God was willing to forgive and to reconcile the sinner to him. The soul need only express contrition for its misdeeds and resolve to walk the path of righteousness. The text accompanying the illustration makes this point plain.

You can have committed as many robberies, villainies, and homicides as there are drops of water in the sea or grains of sand. Even if you have committed every sin there is in the world, and have yet to repent or make confession, even if you have no means of communicating your desire to do so, do not despair because interior contrition will suffice...and as Ezekiel said: 'At the moment the sinner repents, he is saved'.<sup>39</sup>

Vernacular versions also stressed that conversion was always a possibility no matter how sinful the soul. The author of *Een scone leeringe* included the above passage from the Latin *Ars Moriendi* word for word in his tract. He amplified the assurance that it was never too late to convert by highlighting the role of contrition in the turning of the soul.

[For] as long as [the dying man] has contrition and confesses his sins fully, in no way shall he fall into despair. For in every case, inner contrition is enough for blessedness.... And therefore one shall not despair even if he alone had committed all the sins of the world and knew that he should be damned.<sup>40</sup>

Through the examples of Paul, Dismas, the Magdalene, and Peter, both the Latin and the vernacular versions demonstrate conversion's accessibility, and God's desire to call souls to him.

The *Ars Moriendi*, in its various versions, was not the only avenue by which the faithful learned about the role of repentance and conversion in order to achieve salvation. Christians would have known the stories of Paul, Dismas, the Magdalene, and Peter from the Bible. Other biblical stories of conversion such as the woman taken in adultery (John 7:52–8:11), Christ's conversion of a centurion and his household (Luke 7:1–10), and Peter's conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10) supported

<sup>39</sup> Rylands, *Ars Moriendi*; Tenenti, *La Vie et La Mort* 106.

<sup>40</sup> De Geus (ed.), *Een scone leering* 45–46.

the faithful with examples of souls who found salvation by turning toward God. The Bible and Church doctrine offered cautionary stories as well. Christians learned about incomplete or insincere conversion in the account of Simon Magus (Acts 8:18–24). Simon witnessed the apostles performing miracles and attempted to gain their powers by purchasing them. Peter rebuked Simon and admonished him to repent his sins and convert to God. From the second century onward, Church teaching declared that Simon Magus persisted in his false beliefs and was an apostate and a heresiarch.<sup>41</sup> His name was well known to fifteenth-century Christians through the sin of simony, which was a persistent scandal plaguing the Church. The Bible and Church teaching also demonstrated to the faithful the consequences of becoming apostate and failing to reconvert. The story of Judas's betrayal, suicide, and damnation, for example, showed what a powerful impediment despair could be. The narrative of Judas's failure was particularly instructive, and his treachery and death offered Christians a pointed lesson in faith and hope. Theologically, Judas's betrayal was part of God's plan for salvation; without his duplicity humankind would never have been redeemed. Judas's disloyalty did not damn him, however; his actions afterward did. He experienced remorse for his deeds and attempted to return the blood money he received. His reconversion went wrong when, under the weight of his guilt, he committed suicide. His self-murder not only made him guilty of a mortal sin, it also prevented him from working toward redemption and demonstrated that he had fallen into the trap of despair. Judas's concern that his crime was too grave to forgive made him doubt God's mercy and grace and prevented him from turning back toward salvation. When he ended his life, he died an apostate and condemned his soul to hell.

The story of Judas's fall and condemnation was popular among late medieval and early modern Christians. Like Mary Magdalene, Judas provided the laity with an example of a common sinner. The Christian ideal was to follow the model of Christ and the Virgin. Their status as perfect beings, however, made them less accessible to the laity than the

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<sup>41</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1:3. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1. Roberts A. – Donaldson J. – Cleveland Coxe A. (eds.), Roberts A. – Rambaut W. (trans.). (Buffalo: 1885). Published online at: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103123.htm>, last accessed 31 December 2009. Irenaeus's tract titled *Against Heresies*, written in the second century, seems to be the doctrinal *locus classicus* for labeling Simon Magus a persistent apostate and a heresiarch.

Magdalene and Judas. Christians living imperfect lives in an imperfect world were better able to relate to 'sinner saints' than the incarnation of God. Both Mary Magdalene and Judas appeared as characters in Passion plays and saint plays throughout early modern Europe. Their stories introduced rank-and-file Christians to the power of faith, hope, and charity. Passion plays, like the *York Passion* for example, portrayed Judas as a flawed human being whose behavior was not all that dissimilar from the audience watching the play.<sup>42</sup> He was less an arch-villain than an average man who exercised his free will badly and lost salvation because he lost hope. Dramas like the *Digby Mary Magdalene Play* presented Mary as a sinner who became a saint and in doing so offered the laity hope that they too had a chance at redemption.<sup>43</sup> The lessons learned in these venues likely inflected the ways in which Christians engaged with and understood the process of conversion offered in the *Ars Moriendi* and vice versa.

Saint plays were instructive for the faithful but were not the only means of communicating the role of conversion in the Christian plan of salvation. Moralizing plays also stressed the soul's need to (re)turn to God if it wanted redemption. They held out hope that even those not destined to be saints could still repent ill-spent lives and win a place in heaven. In the interest of space, I will limit myself to two examples, *Elkerlijck* (the Dutch version of the ubiquitous fifteenth-century play *Everyman*, ca. 1501) and *Marijken van Nijmegen* (ca. 1500).<sup>44</sup> In both plays, the protagonist is an average person who has fallen into apostasy because she or he has chosen her or his path badly.

*Elkerlijck* (*Everyman*) is a wastrel who, like the prodigal son, has strayed from righteousness. The play begins with God condemning the protagonist's behavior as being synecdochical of all human sin. The Almighty dispatches Death to collect *Elkerlijck*'s soul for judgment. Shocked at his summons, *Elkerlijck* tries to bargain with Death and convince him to pass him by. Death remains implacable and informs *Elkerlijck* that his end is near. As a mercy, Death extends the doomed man a little time. *Elkerlijck* has until the end of the day to get his affairs

<sup>42</sup> Davidson C., "The Realism of the York Realist and the York Passion", *Speculum* 50, 2 (1975) 272.

<sup>43</sup> Karras R., "Holy Harlots: Prostitute Saints in Medieval Legend", *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1, 1 (1990) 3–32.

<sup>44</sup> Van Elslander A., (ed.), *Den spyghel der salicheyt van Elkerlijck* (Antwerp: 1985); Coigneau D. (ed.), *Marijken van Nieuweghen* (Hilversum: 1996).

in order and prepare for his reckoning. The sinner turns to his friends and family for help, but they are just as corrupt as he is and can provide no aid. He next turns to Goodness for help, but she refuses him. Elkerlijk tries to get Virtue to accompany him, but she is too weak (from Elkerlijk's lifetime of sin); before she can make the journey to heaven, she needs Elkerlijk to strengthen her. To that end, she sends him to her sister Knowledge, who leads the doomed man to introspection, which awakens contrition in him. Knowledge dispatches Elkerlijk to Confession, who then enjoins him to do penance. This conversion of the soul strengthens Virtue, who, along with Good, accompanies the reformed Elkerlijk to heaven and helps him face his judgment. At the end of the play, Elkerlijk's conversion is complete; his last-minute turnaround purges his soul of its sin and wins him redemption.

The story of *Marijken van Nijmegen* follows a similar course. As a young girl, Marijken is tempted by adversity and, out of despair, chooses to sell her soul to the devil. She lives with him for several years in Antwerp as his concubine, committing various crimes with him. Over time, she begins to miss her family and convinces the devil to allow her to go back to Nijmegen to see them one last time. On arrival in Nijmegen, Marijken notices that the annual *Ommegang* (Procession) is underway. As part of the festivities, the city puts on a rendition of the well-known play titled *Masscheroen* in which the devil's advocate (Masscheroen) appeals to the heavenly court at his master's behest. Satan argues that all humankind has fallen into sin and is forfeit to him. The Virgin Mary acts as humanity's defense counsel and convinces God to continue allowing humans to strive for redemption. The play awakens Marijken's contrition and she decides to become an apostate of the devil. Enraged, the devil transforms from his human guise into his demonic form, seizes Marijken, sweeps her high into the air, and hurls her earthward to kill her. Marijken appeals to the Virgin's mercy (*a la* the *Masscheroen*, or the play within the play), repents her sinful deeds, and commits to living a virtuous life of penance. The Virgin hears Marijken's plea and saves her life. Marijken undergoes exorcism to break her tie with the devil, but no local priest can absolve her; only the pope has the authority to do so. Marijken travels to Rome where the pope fastens an iron collar around her neck and tells her that when her penance is done she will be freed. After twenty-four years of hard penance, God sends an angel to free the woman and call her home. Like Elkerlijk, and the saints appearing to Moriens in the *Angelic Inspiration Against Desperation*, Marijken's story demonstrates

God's willingness to forgive the gravest of sins. Biblical accounts of conversion, religious plays (Passion, saint, and moralizing), and the *Ars Moriendi* taught Christians that redemption was always possible as long as they had breath and life. God would welcome any sinner who expressed contrition for his misdeeds and made the effort to do what was in him to convert to righteousness.

For Saul, Dismas, the Magdalene, Elkerlijck, Marijken, and Moriens, conversion is a unilateral journey – an unbroken line from sin to salvation. In everyday practice, Christians found that conversion (as in Peter's case) was not a one-time occurrence, but rather was ongoing. The soul's fallenness and the free will's imperfection all but guaranteed that everyone would sin and become apostate in some manner or another. Tracts like the *Ars Moriendi*, as well as Church doctrine and popular drama, reminded the faithful that the struggle for salvation was always possible up to, and including, their final moments. The dyadic structure of the images in the *Ars Moriendi* demonstrates that the outcome of the process – conversion or apostasy – is not fixed, but depends on each decision the soul makes. The temptation/inspiration pairings presents the viewer with a dilemma – which of the two options will he choose? Are his soul and his faith steadfast enough to withstand the temptations before him, or will he falter and turn away from God? Conversion is ultimately about free will and choice; the interplay of the images in the illustration cycle, as well as the spaces between them, thematizes the conundrum the soul faces. Even the act of turning from one page to the next provides a caesura in which the soul has time and space to contemplate and choose. The positive models included in the cycle, ideally, help the soul to select its path wisely. The last illustration in the *Editio Princeps*, the *Death of Moriens*, depicts a successful conversion forged from Moriens's decisions throughout his ordeal. Moriens's triumph provides the viewer with a pattern for his own struggles, but does not guarantee that the viewer will have the same results. The example Moriens sets implies, however, that if the faithful stay steadfast, and make the right choices, God will have mercy and will receive even the most imperfect of souls.

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## THE SERMONS OF A RABBI CONVERTED TO CHRISTIANITY: BETWEEN SYNAGOGUE AND CHURCH

Shulamit Furstenberg-Levi

Scholars have related to the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as 'an age of the sermon for Catholics and Protestants, as well as for Jews'.<sup>1</sup> During this period a vast number of sermons were produced and a new elaborate and eloquent style of sermon was developed.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, various genres related to preaching, such as guides and manuals on how to compose a sermon as well as proposed themes for sermons, were being created by both Christian and Jewish preachers.<sup>3</sup> At the same time the Church, destabilized by the Protestant Reformation, hoped to 'demonstrate the Church's continuing vitality'<sup>4</sup> through mass conversion of the Jews to Catholicism. One of the means which aimed to reach this objective was the forced conversionary sermon,<sup>5</sup> an official conversional policy used already in the thirteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Adriano Prosperi sheds light on the effect that these sermons had on the power-relationship between the Christians and the Jews, in his following description of the forced sermons in Rome:

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<sup>1</sup> Ruderman D.B., (ed.), *Preachers of the Italian Ghetto* (Berkeley: 1992) 3.

<sup>2</sup> On the new style of sermons which starts developing in the sixteenth century see Pozzi G., "Intorno alla predicazione del Panigarola", in *Problemi di vita religiosa in Italia nel Cinquecento: Atti del convegno di storia della chiesa in Italia* (Padua: 1960) 315–322. For an overall view on the diverse types of sermons in this period see: O'Malley J.W., "Content and Rhetorical Form in Sixteenth-Century Treatises on Preaching", in Murphy J.J. (ed.), *Renaissance Eloquence* (Los Angeles – Berkeley: 1984) 238–252.

<sup>3</sup> Manuals for Catholic preachers: Panigarola Francesco, *Modo di comporre una predica* (Milan: Paolo Gottardo Pontio, 1584). For Jewish preachers: R. Moshe ben Shmuel Blanis, *Tna-ei ha-Darshan* (Columbia University MS X893 T15 Q); Sosland H., *A Guide for Preachers on Composing and Delivering Sermons: The OR HA-DARSHANIM of Jacob Zahalon* (New York: 1987).

<sup>4</sup> Stow K., "Church, Conversion and Tradition: The Problem of Jewish Conversion in Sixteenth Century", *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica* 2 (1996) 32.

<sup>5</sup> See Stow K., *Catholic Thought and Papal Jewry Policy 1555–1593* (New York: 1977) chap. 10.

<sup>6</sup> See Grayzel S., *The Church and the Jews in the Thirteenth Century*, vol. 2 (New York – Detroit: 1989) 142–145.

Going to the sermon meant offering to those curious inhabitants of the Christian city the opportunity of demonstrating straightforwardly the supremacy of their religion. This implied transforming the general theological claims into a direct and personal affirmation of power over an entire collectivity. One must imagine the relocation of hundreds of people from the ghetto to the church of the preaching, in the midst of crowds of curious people who commented, laughed, insulted, and at times moved into the realm of [violent (my addition)] actions.<sup>7</sup>

The notion of a 'forced conversionary sermon' was not an unproblematic issue for the Church, who officially defined conversion by force as illegal.<sup>8</sup> The problem was overcome by acknowledging the legitimacy of using an *indirect* force with respect to conversion. This meant that coercing the Jews, not to convert, but only into a situation of exposure to a conversion influence, was accepted. A significant part of these conversion sermons were delivered by Jewish converts to Christianity, among them were also former Jewish preachers. This is not surprising if we take into account that the preacher, in order to reach his Jewish public, had to cross over into the 'terrain' of Jewish rhetoric,<sup>9</sup> which was obviously much more familiar to a former Jew, and even more so to an ex-Jewish rhetorician.

The case examined in this study is especially intriguing. In 1583, only a year after his conversion to Catholicism, Vitale Medici, preacher and physician, previously known as Rabbi Jehiel of Pesaro, delivered at the Santa Croce Church two extensive sermons to the Jews of Florence. The following paragraph, cited from one of these sermons, describing what he imagines that his listeners are saying to themselves, reveals the nature of the rapport between Vitale Medici and his audience:

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<sup>7</sup> Prosperi A., "L'inquisizione Romana e gli Ebrei", in Luzzati M., (ed.) *L'Inquisizione e gli Ebrei in Italia* (Rome: 1994) 105: 'Andare alla predica voleva dire offrire ai curiosi della città cristiana l'occasione per l'esercizio diretto della supremazia della loro religione e cioè per trasformare le pretese teologiche generali nell'affermazione di un potere diretto e personale verso un'intera collettività. Si deve immaginare il trasferimento di diverse centinaia di persone dal ghetto alla chiesa della predica, in mezzo ad ali di curiosi che commentavano, ridevano, insolentivano e qualche volta passavano a vie di fatto'.

<sup>8</sup> Stow, "Church, Conversion and Tradition" 28.

<sup>9</sup> The papal bull of September 1st, 1584 *Sancta Mater Ecclesia* directed the conversion preachers to relate in their sermons to what the Jews had heard in the Synagogue that Saturday. See Parente F., "Il confronto ideologico tra l'ebraismo e la chiesa in Italia", *Italia Judaica* 1 (1981) 321–322.

Is it not he who was here in Florence with us for a long time, very much loved and embraced by almost everybody [...] he preached in our synagogue always praising and exalting the Mosaic Law and always insisting on observing it perfectly. What desire has come upon him now to be baptized? We truly do not know how to find the reason for this crucial instantaneous decision of his.<sup>10</sup>

Vitale Medici in this paragraph is trying to re-establish a previous relationship that he had with his audience, reminding his Jewish 'listeners' that he used to preach to them, as a Jewish *darshan* (preacher), in the synagogue of Florence.

Yet, while we have no record of the sermons that Vitale delivered when he was still a Jew, the sermons delivered at Santa Croce Church were published in 1585 by the Giunti press, under the title *Omellie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze nella Chiesa di Santa Croce*, together with another six sermons delivered by Vitale to a Christian public at various religious societies during the years 1584 and 1585. The two sermons directed to the Jews are surely the highlight of the book.<sup>11</sup> They demonstrate Vitale's oratorical virtuosity in a variety of ways: through their complete structure, which follows the model of contemporary Christian sermons; their use of three languages (Italian, Hebrew and Latin) and the broadness of their knowledge, both in Jewish as well as in Christian culture; in philosophy, natural sciences and medicine. While many other anti-Jewish works were written and published during this period, interestingly, the *explicit* intention of leading to the conversion of the Jews is conveyed particularly in the works written by converts.<sup>12</sup> Among these, Vitale Medici seems to be the only convert

<sup>10</sup> Medici Vitale, *Omellie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze nella Chiesa di Santa Croce*, (Florence: Giunti, 1585) 13: 'Non é questo quello che é stato qui a Firenze tanto tempo con esso noi amato & accarezzato grandemente quasi da tutti predicava nella nostra Sinagoga, sempre magnificando e esaltando la legge Mosaica, e esortandoci sempre alla sua esquisita osservazione: che voglia dunque; gli é venuta ora di battezzarsi? Veramente noi non sappiamo trovare la cagione di questa sua sì grande e subita risoluzione'.

<sup>11</sup> Other sources confirm that Vitale indeed delivered sermons to the Jews at the Santa Croce Church. See, for example, Lapini A., *Diario Fiorentino di Agostino Lapini dal 252 al 1596* (Florence: 1900) 222: 'A' dì 30 di detto maggio, che fu il lunedì della Pasqua dello Spirito Santo, a ore 12, predicò in Santa Croce di Firenze uno ebreo fatto cristiano, chiamato maestro Vitale; quale si portò sì bene, che fe' maravigliare ognuno che lo senti. E lo scopo suo fu per indurre al santissimo battesimo tutti gli ebrei, non tanto quelli che erano li presenti, che vi furono poco manco che tutti quelli che abitano qui in nostra città, ma ogni altro; con tanta e sì bella persuasione e grazia, che fe' maravigliare ognuno; fa oggi qui in Firenze professione di medico fisico'.

<sup>12</sup> See Parente, "Il confronto ideologico" 318.

in Italy during that period that had the privilege to publish his 'forced sermons to the Jews'.

Vitale Medici's sermons became quite well known, especially among other Italian converts in the following generations. While various writings of converts, for example Giulio Morisini's *Via delle fede*, display a certain resemblance to these sermons, Paolo Medici, in his *Catalogue of the Illustrious Neofites* addressed to other converts to Christianity and published in Florence in 1701, chose to *copy* certain sentences directly from Vitale Medici's sermons.<sup>13</sup> Copies of Vitale Medici's book of sermons can be found nowadays in public libraries throughout Italy, with a predominant presence in Tuscany,<sup>14</sup> mostly originating in local convents.

While a recent article of mine focused on the contribution of Vitale's sermons to the study of late sixteenth century history of the Jews in Florence,<sup>15</sup> the present study examines these sermons as a case-study of the phenomenon of *conversion* from Judaism to Catholicism during the Counter-Reformation period in Italy, with the scope of analyzing the convert's relation to his various cultural worlds, from before and after his conversion. Vitale Medici's sermons to a Christian public reflect a total immersion in his new cultural world, which is expressed both in the content as well as in the texts cited. His sermons to the Jews, on the other hand, which were directed to a 'multiple faceted' audience: the Jews standing in front of him at Santa Croce Church whom he had the task to convert to his new faith, and at the same time a public with whom he shared a previous culture, reflect the complex phenomenon of conversion, especially regarding the question of continuity versus discontinuity.

Vitale Medici was undoubtedly very familiar with many aspects of the culture and lifestyle of his audience. In his sermons he constantly

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<sup>13</sup> Medici Paolo speaks of the segregation of the Jews in the exact same words as Vitale Medici. See Paolo Medici, *Catalogo dè Neofiti Illustri usciti per misericordia di Dio dall'ebraismo e poi rendutisi gloriosi nel cristianesimo per esemplarità di costumi e profondità di dottrina opera di Paolo Sebast. Medici sacerdote [...] al altezza reale di Cosimo 3* (Florence: Vincenzo Vangelisti, 1701) 63; Medici Vitale, *Omèlie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 6.

<sup>14</sup> In the following locations: Florence, Siena, Empoli, Montepulciano, Pisa and Prato.

<sup>15</sup> See Furstenberg-Levi S., "The Boundaries between 'Jewish' and 'Catholic' Space in Counter-Reformation Florence as seen by the Convert Vitale Medici", *Italia – Studi e ricerche sulla storia, la cultura e la letteratura degli ebrei d'Italia* 18 (2008) 65–90.

insists on demonstrating this familiarity by reconstructing what the Jew would probably be saying, in various circumstances. The expressions 'io m'immagino' (I imagine), or 'dirà l'ebreo' (the Jew will say) reoccur often in his sermons.

The acquaintance with both Jewish and the Christian 'cultural territories' gave Vitale the possibility to move freely between them in his sermons, even though one must bear in mind that the setting of the two forced sermons is grounded completely in 'Christian territory' – they were delivered in the Santa Croce Church – on significant days for the Christians, during the year 1583: One – 'On the Divine Sacrifice' – (brought as second in the published book) was on the Sunday after the Epiphany, while the other – 'On the Sacrosanct Baptism' – was presented on the second day of the Pentecost.<sup>16</sup>

An analysis of his sermons to the Jews shows that Vitale utilized this possibility of moving between 'cultural territories' in a variety of ways: at times, yet not often, he entered into the 'Jewish territory' with the intention of meeting his audience on a common ground, benefiting from his knowledge of their world in order to create a more convincing and efficient rhetoric; other times he clearly remained in his new 'Christian territory', while emphasizing the *differentiation* and the borders between his old world and his new world, showing why he belongs to the one and not to the other. Yet, the most common way of his moving between cultural spaces was entering into the 'Jewish territory' with the intention of 'invading' it. The following is a demonstration of how these various modes are used in the text of the homilies.

Vitale, in his conversionary sermons, explicitly announces to his new-old audience that he is eagerly *breaking the silence* with them.<sup>17</sup> A careful examination of the text will show that Vitale inserts into the sermons a few expressions which were used exclusively among the Jews. For example, when speaking about the Second Temple of Jerusalem,<sup>18</sup> Vitale uses the term 'seconda casa' (second house) which derives from the Hebrew term *bayit sheni*,<sup>19</sup> or when referring to Maïmonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* he uses the first word of the Hebrew

<sup>16</sup> The holiday of Pentecost is, according to the Christian tradition, a common time for baptism. This custom is based on *Acts of the Apostles* 19:5–6.

<sup>17</sup> See Medici, *Omelie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 28.

<sup>18</sup> Medici, *Omelie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 23.

<sup>19</sup> As Michael Ryzhik pointed out in his lecture "La Bibbia dal pulpito: le citazioni bibliche nella predicazione Cristiana e giudeo-italiano del Cinquecento", in the 43rd Congress of the Società di Linguistica Italiana, Verona, September, 2009.

title – *Morè*, which means guide or teacher.<sup>20</sup> These were probably the words he used in his sermons in the past, delivered in the synagogue, when relating to these concepts. This employing of an ‘inner’ language can clearly help create the impression of a meeting point between the preacher and the audience, which could be a tactic to lead his public in his footsteps.

In his sermon on ‘Baptism’, Vitale leads his Jewish audience on a ‘spiritual journey’. He starts off by joining them in their ‘territory’, and slowly he moves them over to the other side. He begins by telling the Jews to turn to the ‘God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’, words which are taken from the Jewish prayer. Vitale then instructs them to continue this spiritual journey with a personal oration that they should say:

I was born a Jew and I observe the Mosaic Law, the best I can. If you approve of this observance as you liked (before), make me remain in it steadily and constantly. But why do I find myself in this long captivity, with much misery and vileness [...].<sup>21</sup>

He then dictates the following supplication:

God, please do me the favor of showing me this truth, and make me capable of being certain if it is yes or no.<sup>22</sup>

After indicating the reading of various chapters from the book of Psalms as the subsequent step, Vitale ends his ‘spiritual instructions’ with the following ‘reassuring’ words which lead back to his own personal experience:

You will see that God will let you know the truth [...] and you will get to know that which I got to know, which I reached in this way, and used an infinite amount of times, and that the Blessed God has granted me [...].<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Medici, *Omellerie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 40, 42.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Io sono nato Ebreo, & osservo quanto posso la legge Mosaica, se questa osservazione ti è in grazia, come di già tanto te ne compiacevi, fammi Signor restar fermo e costante in essa. Ma perche mi trovo in questa tanto lunga cattività con tanta miseria, e bassezza [...]’. Medici, *Omellerie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 16.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Signor piacciati, piacciati prego di farmi capace, e manifestarmi questa verità, che io sia certo di sì o no’. Medici, *Omellerie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 16.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Tu vedrai che il Signor Dio ti farà conoscere il vero [...] e conoscerai quello, che ho conosciuto io, che ho tenuto questo modo, usatolo infinite volte e Dio benedetto mi ha esaudito’. Medici, *Omellerie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 16.

Starting this imposed 'prayer' with the very words which open the most important Jewish prayer is surely one of the many ways that Vitale employs in order to persuade his Jewish audience to join him.<sup>24</sup>

However, a large part of the sermons accentuate the separation, both cultural and physical, between Vitale's space and that of his audience. While Vitale Medici displays a fluent knowledge of the Jewish sources<sup>25</sup> through extensive citations from the *Tanach* (Jewish Bible) the *Midrash*, the *Mishnah* and *Talmud*, Maimonides' code on Jewish Law (*Mishne Tora*), and references to the *Zohar*, Nahmanides, Rashi, Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed* and to Isaac Abrabanel's *Commentary of the Pentateuch*, an examination of the way he utilizes these sources shows that he makes a very clear-cut division between his cultural world and that of the Jews. He disassociates himself from those Jewish sources, which used to connect him to his Jewish public, by associating the authors of these sources exclusively to his Jewish listeners: 'your Rabbis in the Talmud' (*I vostri Rabbini nel Talmut*); 'your Rabbi Moses the Egyptian' (referring to Maimonides), 'your Abarbanel' etc. At times he adds to the term 'your Rabbis' a specific criticism or just a general negative connotation. For example the medieval Jewish commentator Rashi (Rabbi Solomon Ben Yitzchak) is mentioned as an example of how one should not study the prophets.<sup>26</sup>

Study however the Prophets with a pious mind and a soul unclothed of any pre-sentiments. Not as a way to escape the Messiah, as your Rabbi Solomon, but as a way of finding him and knowing the truth.<sup>27</sup>

This division between his and their world is extended also to the space which used to connect them and now became 'your synagogue', which is part of the ghetto, a physical space which Vitale clearly chose to disassociate himself from:

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<sup>24</sup> In other parts of the homilies Vitale cites additional sections of this Jewish prayer. See Medici, *Omellie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 48.

<sup>25</sup> In addition to Vitale Medici's Jewish sources, which are the main concern of this study, he cites freely from Aristotle, Virgil and Cicero as well as a few references to the New Testament and other Christian sources.

<sup>26</sup> Rashi believed that Isaiah 52:13–53:12 refers to Israel as opposed to Christian exegesis which saw in this source a clear biblical reference to the Messiah.

<sup>27</sup> 'Studiate dunque li Profeti, con pia mente con animo spogliato d'ogni affetto, non per fuggire il Messia, come fa il vostro Rabi Salomone, ma per ritrovarlo, e conoscere il vero'; Medici, *Omellie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 48.

Because being in this extreme misery in which *you* find yourself, totally immersed in poverty, and begging, persecuted under this regime, expelled by the other, restricted to *that* small place [...].<sup>28</sup>

Despite the clear borderline which Vitale Medici draws between the Jews and himself he chooses to use the Jewish sources as one of his main persuasive means to convince his public to believe in Christian fundamentals.

During the Counter-Reformation the use of rabbinical sources as a legitimate conversional method was accepted by the Church. Yet, paradoxically, at the same time the Roman Inquisition gave the order to have the Talmud burned publicly in Rome in 1553. The Church was perturbed by the question of which approach was more effective as a conversional means: eliminating the Talmud,<sup>29</sup> as a source full of blasphemy against Christianity, or on the contrary, demonstrating to the Jews that the rudiments of Christianity are proven in the Talmud.<sup>30</sup> The latter approach, adopted by Vitale Medici, was initially developed in the medieval anti-Jewish work *Pugio Fidei* written by the Spanish Christian theologian Raymond Martin. In fact, a close examination of Vitale's sermons shows that the various citations which he brings from rabbinic sources appear also in the *Pugio Fidei*. From this we can deduce that Vitale was very careful in his use of rabbinic sources, which, for a former Jewish preacher must have meant a significant change, considering that the typical Jewish sermons of the time were usually very rich with citations from rabbinic sources: they would generally commence with a citation of a verse from the *Torah* following a rabbinic statement. Only after that, was the theme of the sermon introduced. This meant that a Jewish *darshan* who preached at least once a week, would utilize a numerous amount of rabbinic references throughout a year, whereas Vitale was limited to the restricted selection of quotations from rabbinic sources which 'served' the Christian

<sup>28</sup> '[...] perche' stando voi in questa estrema miseria, nella quale vi trovate tanto immersi poveri, mendichi, perseguitati in questo Regno, discacciati da quell altro, ristretti in quell picciol luogo [...]', Medici, *Omelie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 6.

<sup>29</sup> This was done often by the neophytes themselves. See Segre R., "Neophytes During the Italian Counter-Reformation: Identities and Biographies", in *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies* 2 (Jerusalem: 1975) 139–142.

<sup>30</sup> For a thorough description of these paradoxical stands of the Church see: Stow K., "The Burning of the Talmud in 1553, in the Light of Sixteenth Century Catholic Attitudes toward the Talmud", *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et de Renaissance* 34 (1972) 435–459; Parente, "Il confronto ideologico" 303–373.



cause. The Talmud is introduced in the sermons as revealing the Christian truth:

Take notice Jews, take notice Jews, and God should be thanked for giving me the knowledge of this truth and he operated in a way that I acknowledged this authority of the Talmud, of which you will now hear, and open properly the eyes of the mind, which (if you are capable of reasoning) should be enough to make you convert. The supreme providence of the grand God started demonstrating to the Jews manifest signs that same year in which his son was crucified [...].<sup>31</sup>

Vitale then brings the following Talmudic paragraph, from the tract *Yoma*, also cited in *Pugio Fidei*:<sup>32</sup>

Our Rabbis taught: During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple the western-most light did not shine; nor did the crimson colored strap become white; nor did the lot come up in the right hand; and the doors of the *Hekal* would open by themselves [...].<sup>33</sup>

After citing this Talmudic source which describes a period in which the miraculous signs in the Temple, which until that time acted as a demonstration of the closeness and forgiveness of God, were not functioning anymore, Vitale proceeds to give his own interpretation of the quote:

Well then, let us begin to affirm these words of the Talmud, which begin as following: forty years before the destruction of the Temple, the time that Christ was crucified; it was that same year, this, Jews, do not deny [...].<sup>34</sup>

The Jewish tradition interprets the cessation of these signs as a warning or a prediction of the future destruction of the Temple. Vitale

<sup>31</sup> 'Notate Ebrei, notate Ebrei, e sia ringraziato Dio, che mi ha fatto conoscere questa verità, & ha operato in modo, che io habbia visto questa autorità del Talmut, laqual ora sentirete, & aprite bene gli occhi della menta, che sol questo (se siate capaci di ragione) vi ha da bastare a farvi convertire. La somma provvidenza del grande Dio cominciò a mostrare a gli Ebrei [...] segni manifesti quel medesimo anno che crocifissero il suo figliuolo[...]; Medici, *Omellie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 19.

<sup>32</sup> Martin Raymond, *Pugio Fidei: ad versus Mauro set Judaeos* (Leipzig: 1687) 370.

<sup>33</sup> 'תנו רבנן: מ' שנה קודם חרבן הבית לא היה נר מערבי דולק ולא היה לשון של' [...] 'זהורית מלבין ולא היה גורל עולה בימין והיו דלתות ההיכל נפתחות מאליהן' This quotation is similar to the version from *The Babylonian Talmud*, "Yoma" 39b.

<sup>34</sup> 'Orsu cominciamo a dichiarare queste parole del Talmut, lequali cosi' cominciano. Quarant'anni avanti la destruzion del Tempio, il tempo quando fu crocifisso Cristo; fu questo medesimo anno, questo non lo negare Ebrei [...]; Medici, *Omellie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 20.

Medici, on the other hand, diverges from this reading while continuing a line of thought developed in the *Pugio Fidei*, both in his specific choice of citations from rabbinic sources as well as in some of his main general claims – namely, that the Talmud proves the belief in Christian fundamentals. Another general claim which they have in common and often try to prove is that the Jews themselves do not listen to their own authentic Torah, or in other words used by Vitale ‘don’t believe in Moses’<sup>35</sup> due to the distorted understanding of their ‘ancient Rabbis’. In the examples above Vitale takes over the ‘Jewish cultural space’, while dispossessing the Jews from their own traditional sources.

While this study so far has emphasized the divisions between Vitale Medici’s cultural territory and that of his audience, the following section will show that a careful examination of the sermons, through the viewpoint of the cultural reality of the Italian Jews of that period, can expose a possible continuity in Vitale’s positions from before and after his conversion. Sermons usually echo various actualities of the specific time and place in which they are given. In fact, a perusal of Vitale Medici’s sermons to the Jews shows that he touches the subject of several important controversies that took place within the Jewish communities in Italy of that period. Although he articulates his opinions harshly and aggressively, if we view some of them in the context of the disputes which took place within the Jewish society, our understanding of the meaning of Vitale’s conversion may be slightly modified. The internal non-resolved issues which Vitale alludes to in his sermons range between questions regarding the Jewish religious law (*Halakha*) and discussions concerning various currents in Jewish Thought.

### *Issues Regarding Halakhic Disputes*

One of the halakhic issues which Vitale refers to is the issue of wine which is not used for sacramental purposes.<sup>36</sup> The Jewish law forbids any use of the wine used by idolaters for libation. To this law the Rabbis added a subsidiary law against drinking wine touched by idolaters, even if they have not used it for sacramental purposes. The application

<sup>35</sup> Medici, *Omellerie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 54.

<sup>36</sup> This halakhic issue has been entitled ‘Ordinary Wine’ (in Hebrew: *Stam Yainam*).

of this law to different actualities is complex, and one of the questions raised often was: who is considered an idolater.

The Jews in Italy were known to have a lenient attitude in relation to this subsidiary law. Although most of the Italian Rabbis did observe this law, there were among them those who were not strict in observing it. Moreover, most of the Italian Rabbis kept silent in regards to the non-observance of this law by the members of their communities.<sup>37</sup>

In his sermon on 'Baptism', while sermonizing to the Jews on their difficulty to accept the Christian faith, Vitale Medici accuses them of perceiving Christianity as idolatry. Since they won't accept this accusation, Vitale tries to prove to them that this is indeed their approach. After referring to a specific text in which Maimonides expresses this claim outwardly, Vitale continues by showing them that their behavior discloses this perception:

But I would like to prove to you through the senses, through experience, that you claim that this Faith is idolatry. Do you deny that those Jews who act as though they were saints and the Pharisees that are, I would say, scrupulous observers of the ceremonies of the Mosaic law, avoid drinking wine made or touched by a Christian? Certainly in many places in Italy, and universally in all the Levant this is observed extremely rigorously, and why is this? Because they believe that Christianity is idolatry.<sup>38</sup>

We do not have any references that indicate what Vitale Medici's stand as a Rabbi was before his conversion. If he was indeed among those Italian Rabbis who didn't strictly observe the prohibition to drink wine touched by gentiles, we can see the position taken in the above paragraph, as a convert, as a rather natural continuation to his previous opinions.

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<sup>37</sup> The lenient approach to this law distressed many Rabbis outside of Italy, of whom some tried to intervene. On this complex issue see the following article in Hebrew: Cohen G., "le-toldot ha-pulmus al stam yaynam be-italya u-mekorotav" (On the History of the Polemics Regarding 'Ordinary Wine' in Italy and its Sources), *Sinai* 77 (1975) 62–90.

<sup>38</sup> 'Ma io vi vò provare per il senso, per la sperienza, che voi tenete che questa Fede, sia Idolatria, mi neherete voi, che quelli Ebrei che fanno il santo e il fariseo, che son, dico, scrupolosi osservatori delle cerimonie della legge Mosaica, si astengono di nò voler bere il vino, che fa, o che tocchi il Cristiano? Certo in molti luoghi della Italia e universalmente per tutto Levante, l'osservano rigorosissimamente, perche questo? perche essi credono, che il Cristiano sia Idolatra'. Medici, *Omellie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 18.

There is however one case, in his sermons, where Vitale Medici reveals what his opinion was before his conversion, when he was still preaching to the Jews in the synagogue. Vitale addresses the miserable way of life of the Jews, which includes their being constrained to earn a living in non-decent ways, such as money-lending:

You always have to struggle to think, to torment yourselves, to speak, to act and to find ways to earn [a living] in a lawful or unlawful way. Whether the income is acquired legally or illegally, you are always involved in offending your neighbor by holding his belongings against the good conscience, and therefore you cannot be saved, even if your law, presently useless, would be good and true, and do not think that it is highly [good], and that it is allowed to swindle goods, and cheat the Christian. It is not so, it is not so.<sup>39</sup>

He then refers to his sermons from that period:

You know how many times I warned you while I read to you in your Synagogue and I showed you very effectively that it is more of a sin to swindle a Christian than a Jew.<sup>40</sup>

If this declaration of Vitale indeed reflects the historical truth, one can understand that Vitale Medici, when still Rabbi Jehiel of Pesaro, preached against the use of usury.<sup>41</sup> Vitale Medici, in both the above issues takes a stand of avoiding an attitude which might seem offensive to the non-Jews: he does not accept the 'Ordinary Wine' law which would be indicating that the Christians are idolaters, and he preaches against the problematic aspects of money-lending regarding its moral

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<sup>39</sup> 'Sete sforzati a pensare sempre, a travagliare, a parlare e operare e trovare modi di guadagnare per *fas* o *nefas*, o lecito o illecito, che il guadagno sia, eccovi sempre immersi nella offesa del prossimo con tenere la sua roba contra alla buona coscienza, e così voi non vi potete salvare, ancor che la vostra or inutil legge fosse buona, e vera e non vi pensate che sia altamente, e che vi sia licito fraudare la roba, e ingannare il Cristiano che non è così, non è così'. Medici, *Omellie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 6–7.

<sup>40</sup> 'Sapete bene quante volte ve ne avvertivo quando vi leggevo nella vostra sinagoga e vi mostravo tanto efficacemente che e' più peccato ingannare un Cristiano che un Ebreo'. Medici, *Omellie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 7.

<sup>41</sup> The Jewish sermons which have reached us from that period give the impression that the sixteenth century Italian Rabbis usually did not preach explicitly against the use of usury in regard to non-Jews, only in regard to Jews. This is probably a consequence of the economic situation of the Jews which would have deteriorated without the possibility of the money lending enterprise. Rabbi Azariah Figo in his *Sefer Binah le-Itim*, drush 10, speaks against usury in a way that appears general, but careful reading shows that he is referring to taking usury from Jews.

implications. These were unresolved issues within the Italian Jewish society of that period.

*The Debate Between Rational and Mystical Approaches in Judaism*

Controversy in the Jewish society of the sixteenth and seventeenth century was not limited only to the area of *Halakha*. In this period the realm of Jewish thought began to include a larger variety of 'bodies of knowledge' which were not always in agreement among themselves. In his book *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, Robert Bonfil describes the infiltration of the Kabala into the lives of the Jews in Italy.<sup>42</sup> According to his analysis, after a period in which the knowledge of Kabala was restricted to narrow circles, in the sixteenth century it started entering into broad Jewish circles. This can be seen, for example, with the printing of the *Zohar* in Italy, first in 1558 (in Mantua) and soon after that in 1560 (in Cremona), and in the introduction of the Kabbalistic ideas, in this period, into the Rabbis' sermons.<sup>43</sup> Yet, at the same time we find Rabbis who strongly disagreed with this increasing tendency and expressed their disapproval explicitly.<sup>44</sup> As in regard to most other issues, Vitale's opinions in this realm, before his conversion, are unknown to us.

In his sermons, Vitale relates both to Maimonides, the prototype of rational approach as well as to the *Zohar* and Nahmanides, the sources which were becoming more popular in the Italian-Jewish intellectual panorama. He relates to all three of these sources as having 'maggior autorità'<sup>45</sup> for his Jewish listeners, yet the sources belonging to the 'mystical' trend are granted the additional title 'principalissimi' (the most fundamental), and he describes their content with enthusiasm. The Nahmanides's account of the manna – 'a preeminent light which, materialized through its creator's will', which is very similar to that of the *Zohar*, is accompanied by Vitale's exclamation: 'Oh, beautiful words! Oh, holy words!'<sup>46</sup> The kabbalistic interpretation fits perfectly

<sup>42</sup> See Bonfil R., *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: 1994) 169–178.

<sup>43</sup> Such as Rabbi Judah Moscato.

<sup>44</sup> Such as Leone da Modena and Simon Luzatto.

<sup>45</sup> Maimonides: Medici, *Omellie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 18; Nahmanides and *Zohar*: Medici, *Omellie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 55.

<sup>46</sup> 'Oh belle parole, o sante parole', Medici, *Omellie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 55.

with the Christian concept of the Eucharist, and Vitale seems to be clearly using the Kabala to promote his Christian ideas. Nevertheless, his enthusiastic reaction to the Kabbalistic mode of interpretation raises the query if, before his conversion, he was among the Rabbis who promoted the diffusion of Kabala, and if he is continuing a spiritual tendency which existed already before.

Interestingly, also issues that apparently may seem to be expressing a particularly *Catholic* view, can be seen as continuing tendencies in the Jewish cultural world. An interesting task in the analysis of the sermons of Vitale Medici, previously a Jewish preacher, is tracing his oratorical models. One would wonder if he maintains a familiar form when preaching to his 'audience' from the past, or if he completely 'converts' his sermons. Our case would seem to be pointing clearly towards a complete alteration into a Christian direction. In search of his oratorical models, one must note that the only preacher who Vitale mentions in his sermons is Papa San Leone, from the fifth century, who was the first Pope of whom we have an organic collection of his sermons. Vitale refers to him when discussing the figure of Melchizedek, in the context of the division that he makes, in his sermons, between two types of priests:<sup>47</sup> the prototype of Aaron which is associated with a particular genealogy, and that of Melchizedek which is not connected to a carnal birth, but as Vitale elaborates, can be 'from any nation, any sort of person, as long as they are capable'.<sup>48</sup> As a convert, emphasizing the 'Melchizedek model' is essential for Vitale.

As to the structure of his sermons, Vitale seems to be modeling them on contemporary Christian guidelines. Both sermons are composed of: an introduction; the body of the sermon which contain two parts, in which the second part introduces a new type of narrative in relation to the first part; a short summary and a prayer at the end.<sup>49</sup> While we have classified Vitale Medici entirely as a follower of the Christian oratorical model, we must take into account that during that period

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Pope Leo I, *Omellie Lettere*, Mariucci T. (ed.), (Turin: 1969) 59, 70.

<sup>48</sup> '[...] ma d'ogni nazione, d'ogni sorte di persone, pur che siano idonei'; Medici, *Omellie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 51.

<sup>49</sup> Vitale Medici delivers his sermons more or less during the same period that Panigarola was writing his manual on how to compose a sermon. Although Vitale would not have seen this work, it is interesting to point out to the similarities between the structure of his sermons and the instructions given by Panigarola, starting in the fourth chapter of his *Modo di comporre una predica*.

we begin to find also among Jewish preachers, who are completely faithful to their own religion, those who construct their sermons on the Christian guidelines, such as Rabbi Leon Modena who, according to Joanna Weinberg 'chose to model himself on Francesco Panigarola who was one of the most famous preachers of the time [...]'<sup>50</sup>

The examples above provide us with a multifaceted picture of the Jewish society of sixteenth and seventeenth century Italy, which may have implications on our understanding of the concept of 'conversion'. The act of conversion in this case might not necessarily entail an absolute transition, compared to the alchemical sciences, in which one substance changes into something utterly different by a mysterious process. It might imply the *taking to an extreme* many of one's previous ideas.

### Conclusion

A recent art-historical study on the pulpit of Santa Croce Church, from the period we are concerned with, describes its function in the following terms: 'Here, in the preaching pulpit of Santa Croce, the preacher in the lower nave would find himself in the midst of his lay listeners; surrounded by the crowds, the pulpit could serve as a virtual theater in the round [...]'.<sup>51</sup> This portrayal echoes one of the opening paragraphs of the sermon on the 'Divine Sacrifice', where Vitale describes his Jewish audience as they 'circle him like a crown':

What a marvel it will be if now that I've climbed up to this pulpit in order to talk things over with you, while you encircle me, indeed in a beautiful and honored crown, in order to listen to me. We will be feeling in our soul mirth, merriness, joy and satisfaction [...].<sup>52</sup>

We may be tempted to imagine the situation of Vitale Medici, at the Santa Croce Church, with his Jewish audience surrounding him, as a

<sup>50</sup> Weinberg J., "Preaching in the Venetian Ghetto: The Sermons of Leon Modena", in Ruderman (ed.) *Preachers of the Italian Ghetto* 122.

<sup>51</sup> Ben-Aryeh Debby N., "The Santa Croce Pulpit in Context: Sermons, Art and Space", *Artibus et Historiae* 57 (2008) 75–93.

<sup>52</sup> 'Che meraviglia sia, se ora, che io sono asceto in questo pulpito per ragionare con esso teco, e too che mi circondi di sì bella & onorata corona, per ascoltarmi, habbiamo da sentire nell'animo nostro gaudio, contento, letizia, e gioia [...]' Medici, *Omelie fatte alli ebrei di Firenze* 28.

virtual theater, in which he displays his rhetorical and oratorical talents. Yet, there is one element missing for the completion of a full image of a theater, which is the audience. We must ask ourselves if the Jews forced to attend Vitale Medici's sermons can be seen as playing the role of an audience in this virtual theater. Judging by the historical documents which we have access to, these sermons only led to a deeper resentment and anger on the part of the Florentine Jews towards their preacher which resulted in violent attacks on Vitale Medici on the part of Jews.<sup>53</sup> The violent reaction of the Jews to Vitale Medici's sermons seems to indicate that the aggressive and domineering facets of his sermons exceeded the persuasive and communicative aspects. Although there may be elements of continuity in his conversion, Vitale's Jewish public appears to have reacted to the hostile and discontinuous aspects of his conversion.

Vitale Medici's actual audience is more probable to be found among the readers of the printed sermons, namely the converts to Christianity as well as other Christian readers. For this public Vitale would signify a representative link in the succession of conversionary writings, from Raymond Martin's *Pugio Fidei* and until Paolo Medici's *Catalogue of the Illustrious Neofites*.

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<sup>53</sup> Renata Segre brings documentation to a case in which Vitale Medici was attacked and hurt in his neck when coming out of the sermon to the Christians on 'Giovedì santo' (probably the one published in his *Omellie fatte alli ebrei* 83–92). See Segre R., "Il mondo ebraico nei cardinali della Controriforma", in *Italia Judaica: gli Ebrei in Italia dalla segregazione alla prima emancipazione. Atti del III convegno internazionale, Tel-Aviv 15–20 giugno 1986*. (Rome: 1989) 131.



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PARABOLIC ANALOGY AND SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT  
IN JERÓNIMO NADAL'S *ADNOTATIONES ET MEDITATIONES*  
IN *EVANGELIA* OF 1595

Walter S. Melion

Amongst the many plates illustrating the ministry cycle of Christ's life in Jerónimo Nadal's *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia* (*Annotations and Meditations on the [Liturgical] Gospels*), parables portrayed in sequences of two or more prints constitute an extensive and distinctive subset [Figs. 1–5].<sup>1</sup> These images call the viewer to account,

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<sup>1</sup> On the *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia*, see Daly P.M. – Dimler G.R. (eds.), *Corpus librorum emblematum: The Jesuit Series, Part Four* (Montreal – Kingston – London – Buffalo: 1997) 164–169, nos. J.1053–J.1055; Nicolau M., *Jerónimo Nadal: Obras y doctrinas espirituales* (Madrid: 1949) 63, 114–120, 121–132, 166–170, 194, 205, 455, 464; Buser T., “Jerome Nadal and Early Jesuit Art in Rome”, *The Art Bulletin* 58 (1976) 424–433; Mauquoy-Hendrickx M., “Les Wierix illustreurs de la Bible dite de Natalis”, *Quaerendo* 6 (1976) 28–63, esp. 28–34; Freedberg D., “A Source for Rubens's Modello of the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin: A Case Study in the Response to Images”, *The Burlington Magazine* 120 (1978) 432–442, esp. 436–440; Wadell M.-B., *Evangelicae historiae imagines: Entstehungsgeschichte und Vorlagen* [Gothenburg Studies in Art and Architecture 3] (Gothenburg: 1985) 9–17, 46–48; Fabre P.-A., *Ignace de Loyola: le lieu de l'image* (Paris: 1992) 163–239, 263–295; Rheinbay P., *Biblische Bilder für den inneren Weg: Das Betrachtungsbuch des Ignatius-Gefährten Hieronymus Nadal (1507–1580)* (Engelsbach – Frankfurt – St. Peter Port: 1995) 35–106; Spengler D., “Die Ars Jesuitica der Gebrüder Wierix”, *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 57 (1996) 161–194; Melion W.S., “Artifice, Memory, and Reformatio in Hieronymus Natalis's *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia* of 1595”, *Renaissance and Reformation* 22 (1998) 5–34; Dekoninck R., “*Imagines peregrinantes*: The International Genesis and Fate of Two Biblical Picture Books (Hiël and Nadal) Conceived in Antwerp at the End of the Sixteenth Century”, in Gelderblom A.-J. – Jong J.L. de – Vaeck M. van (eds.), *The Low Countries as a Crossroads of Religious Beliefs* [Intersections 3] (Leiden – Boston: 2004) 49–64; Melion W.S., “The Art of Vision in Jerome Nadal's *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia*”, in Homann F.A. (ed.-trans.), *Jerome Nadal, Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels. Volume I: The Infancy Narratives* (Philadelphia: 2003) 1–96; Dekoninck R., “*Ad imaginem*”: Status, fonctions et usages de l'image dans la littérature spirituelle jésuite du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle [Travaux du Grand Siècle 26] (Geneva: 2005) 234–237, 287–289, 303–305; Melion W.S., “*Mortis illius imagines ut vitae*: The Image of the Glorified Christ in Jerome Nadal's *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia*”, in Homann F.A. (ed.-trans.), *Jerome Nadal, Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels. Volume III: The Resurrection Narratives* (Philadelphia: 2005) 1–32; Stroomberg H., “Introduction”, in *Hollstein's Dutch & Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts, 1450–1700: The Wierix Family, Book Illustrations*, 2 parts, compiled by H. Stroomberg, ed. J. van der Stock (Ouderkerk aan den IJssel: 2007) 2:3–7; Melion W.S., “*Haec per*

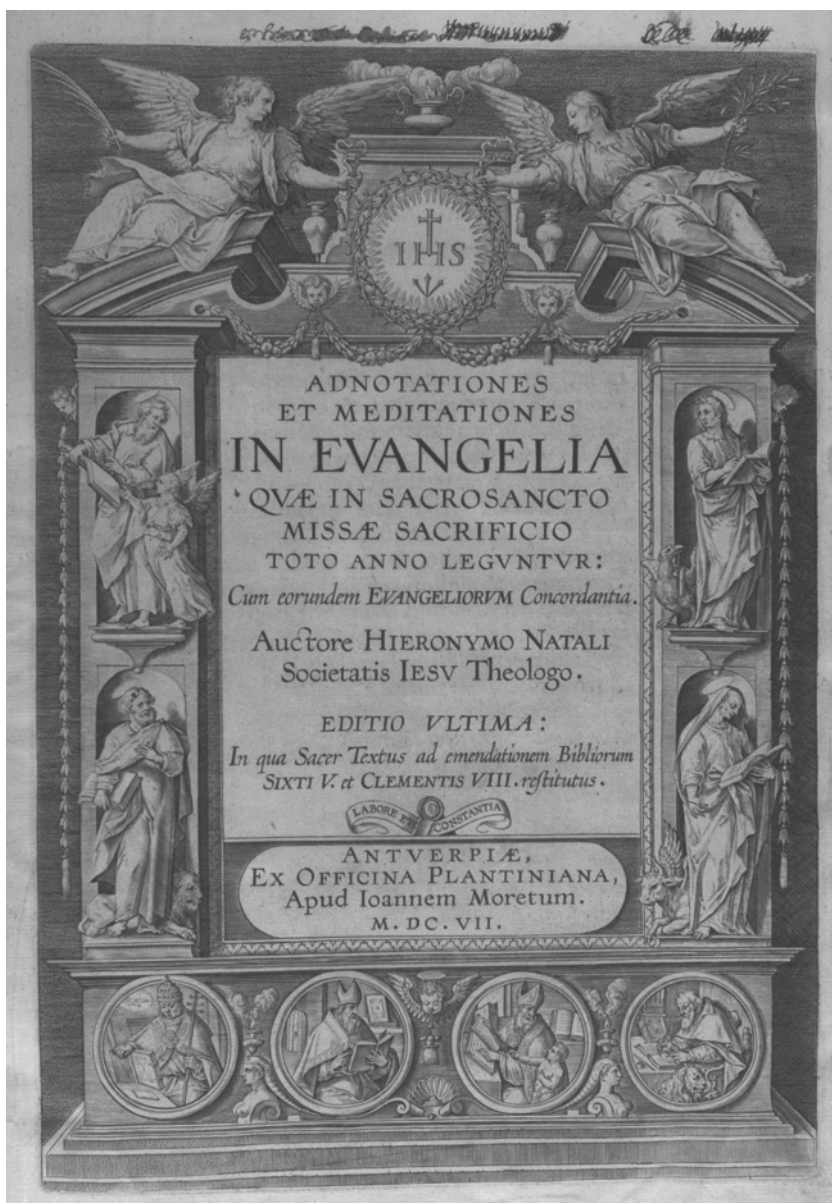


Fig. 1. Jan or Hieronymus Wierix (?) after Maarten de Vos (?), Title-Page to Jerónimo Nadal, *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia* (Antwerp, Balthasar Moretus: 1607). Engraving, 315 × 216 mm., Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.



Fig. 2. Antoon II Wierix after Bernardino Passeri, *Parable of the Sower*, imago 38 in Jerónimo Nadal, *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia* (Antwerp, Balthasar Moretus: 1607). Engraving, 233 × 146 mm., Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.



Fig. 3. Antoon II Wierix after Maarten de Vos, *Parable of the Tares*, imago 39 in Jerónimo Nadal, *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia* (Antwerp, Balthasar Moretus: 1607). Engraving, 234 × 147 mm., Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.



Fig. 4. Antoon II Wierix after Bernardino Passeri, *Christ Heals the Dropsical Man*, imago 48 in Jerónimo Nadal, *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia* (Antwerp, Balthasar Moretus: 1607). Engraving, 234 × 147 mm., Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.



Fig. 5. Antoon II Wierix after Bernardino Passeri, *Parable of the Great Supper*, imago 49 in Jerónimo Nadal, *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia* (Antwerp, Balthasar Moretus: 1607). Engraving, 234 × 147 mm., Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.



challenging him to discern the key visual analogy upon which the coherence of the parabolic sequence is invariably premised. This *similitudo* turns on the figure of Christ preaching, which the imagery of his parable is seen implicitly to mirror in one of two ways. When Christ and the parable he promulgates appear in the same *imago*, his pose is transferred onto the parable's chief protagonist, so that the dual identity of Christ as parabolic source and parabolic subject becomes potentially discernible. Alternatively, when one print foregrounds Christ teaching, while its pendant foregrounds the parable alone, the visual analogy between source and subject operates across the two *imagines*, often in a more embedded or concealed fashion. Both analogical modes require that close attention be paid to instances of formal consonance, and further, that they be construed as hermeneutic prompts. Moreover, the correspondence between Christ and the parable is often hard to discern: Christ may inhabit a background scene so small that it is difficult to distinguish, or the paired prints may illustrate two chapters on consecutive Gospel passages that are nevertheless separated according to the liturgical calendar. Since Nadal's chapters follow the liturgical sequence (marked in Roman numerals at the top right of each *imago*), whereas the images are numbered harmonically (in Arabic numerals, again at the top right) – that is, in chronological order – the difficulty of spotting correspondences increases when, as sometimes happens, the prints are interleaved, rather than bound in a continuous sequence at the front or back of the book. Such exigencies, as I shall argue, prove crucial to the viewer's experience of the parable as an heuristic instrument of faith, designed by Christ himself to activate the faculty of spiritual discernment. In addition, my essay asks how and why the analogical format, along with its attendant difficulties, governs the illustration of parables throughout the *Adnotationes et meditationes*. Finally, there is the question of Nadal's primary source, the *Glossa ordinaria*, and the light it sheds on his conception of the parable's essential form and function. For Nadal, the parable licenses the program of spiritual exercises his book undertakes, for it necessitates a

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*imagines huius mysterij ecclesia sancta [clamat]: The Image of the Suffering Christ in Jerome Nadal's Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia*", in Homann F.A. (ed.-trans.), *Jerome Nadal, Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels. Volume II: The Passion Narratives* (Philadelphia: 2007) 1–73; and idem, *The Meditative Art: Studies in the Northern Devotional Print, 1550–1625* [Early Modern Catholicism and the Visual Arts 1] (Philadelphia: 2009) 107–150.

level of engagement with Christ that is both meditative and exegetical, and thereby exemplary. Reading the parable, as we shall see, requires that its familiar images be converted into metaphors of Gospel truths, and in turn, the ability to construe images as metaphors bears witness to an internal process of conversion that opens the spiritual eyes of the parabolic recipient, making it possible for these metaphoric truths to be discerned. For Nadal, interpretative *conversio* aligns with *conversio* of the spirit, and in this sense, conversion plays out as a process of translation (concrete image equals evangelical metaphor) that jointly operates as a process of transformation (one who perceives ostensibly becomes one who discerns spiritually).

Let me begin by briefly describing this important Jesuit book. Composed by Nadal at the behest of Ignatius of Loyola, the *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia* consists of 153 chapters, each based on an *imago* portraying one or more scenes from the life of Christ [Fig. 1]. As noted above, the chapters follow the liturgical calendar, whereas the pictures, ordered like a Gospel harmony, enumerate events from the infancy, ministry, Passion, and Resurrection of Christ [Figs. 2–5]. Sponsored by the Jesuit order, the book was issued in 1595/96 by the publisher Martinus Nutius of Antwerp, the images having first appeared in 1593, independent of the text. Jan, Hieronymus, and Antoon Wierix headed the team of engravers that produced the 153 folio-size prints after designs by Bernardino Passeri and Maarten de Vos. (Entitled *Evangelicae historiae imagines* [*Images of Gospel History*], this sequence retains its own frontispiece, even when integrated into the *Adnotationes et meditationes*.) The chapters are organized into three chief parts: first, Gospel pericopes derived from the Tridentine *Missale Romanum* [Fig. 6]; second, annotations attached to lettered places within the image, that describe, often in great detail, the scenes housed in these places [Fig. 7]; and third, meditations reflecting upon the figurative meaning of the visual scenes whose elements the annotations have parsed [Figs. 7–8]. The meditations treat doctrinal topics in the order set by the annotations, but whereas the latter are plain in diction and analytical in argument, the former are rich in affective tropes. The *meditationes* often start and finish by urging the reader-viewer fervently to supplicate Christ as a first step to imitating him. Nadal's treatise served as a complement to Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*, instructing scholastics enrolled at the order's colleges how to visualize and meditate the Gospels prescribed for Sundays and feast days, and on this basis, how better to apprehend the Jesuit

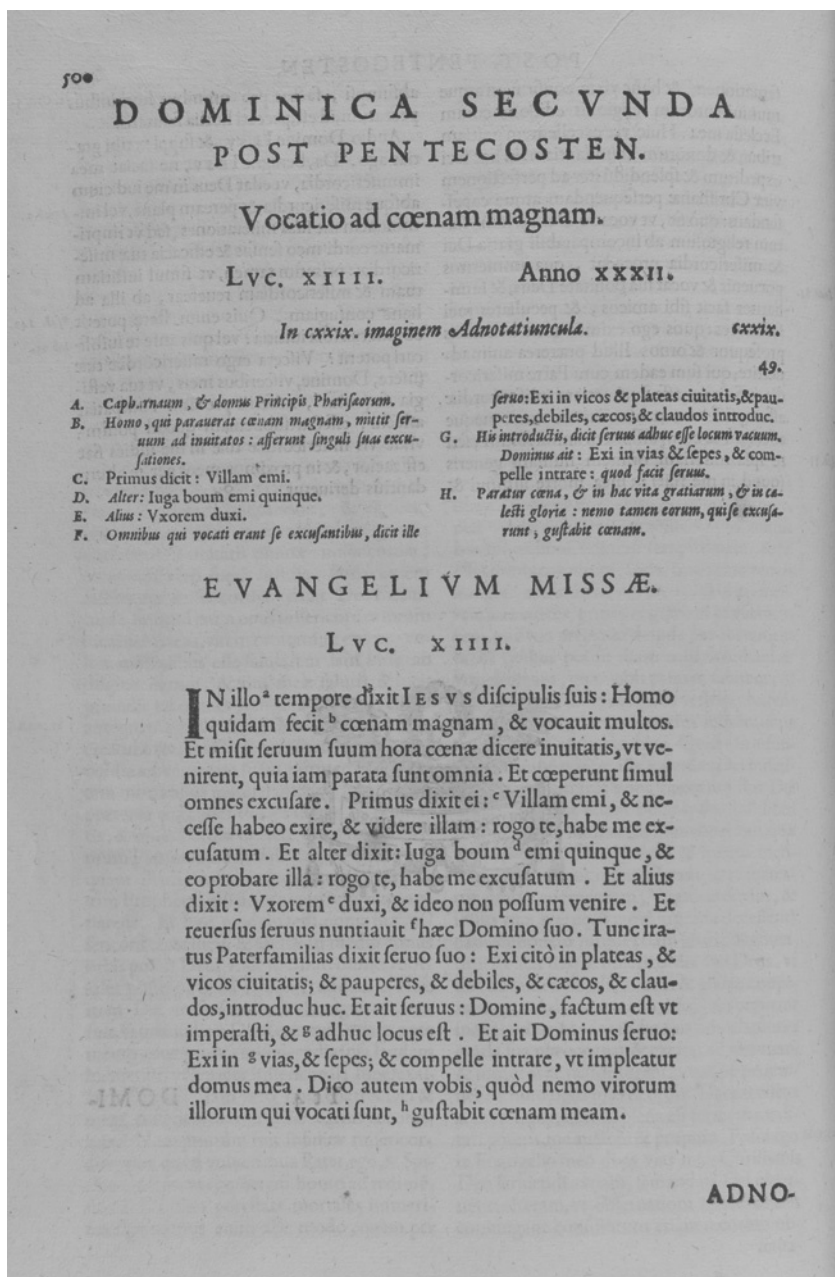


Fig. 6. Jerónimo Nadal, "Dominica secunda post Pentecosten. Vocatio ad coenam magnam. In CXXIX. imaginem Adnotatiuncula. Evangelium missae", in *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia* (Antwerp, Balthasar Moretus: 1607) 500. Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

vocation. I shall examine four pendant *imagines* – 38 and 39, 48 and 49 – that respectively illustrate the parables of the sower (Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8) and of the great supper (Luke 14) [Figs. 2–5]. These images attach respectively to chapters 17 and 15 (Sexagesima Sunday and the fifth Sunday after Epiphany), and to 140 and 129 (the sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost and the second Sunday after Pentecost).

*Imago* 38 describes the parable of the sower, delivered by Christ from a ship docked at Capharnaum on the Sea of Galilee [Fig. 2]. Since the apostles approached Christ soon after his sermon, asking him to expound the parable and explain why he teaches in parables (Matthew 13:36, Mark 4:10, Luke 8:9), this episode functions in the exegetical tradition as the warrant for parabolic instruction. It sets forth the manner and meaning of such parables, as authorized by Christ.<sup>2</sup> In the far distance, Jesus sits aboard the ship, addressing the crowd gathered on the shore (A). The parable itself unfolds in the fore- and middle-ground: the farmer sows seeds (B); some fall onto a thoroughfare (C), others onto stony ground (D), still others amongst thorns (E), and some onto good soil, whence alone they yield a thirty-, sixty-, and hundred-fold of grain (F). The purposeful artificiality of scene F, with its boxlike stands of wheat, signifies that the parabolic images are figurative rather than literal, and consequently alludes to the exposition of the parable by Christ ('*parabolam explicat Christus*'): as set forth in the pericopes quoted at the start of chapter 17, the seeds are the *verbum Dei* (both the words of the Gospel and Christ as the Word), which are trampled when they fall *in viam*, that is, into recalcitrant hearts and minds that refuse to receive Christ; quickly sprout and then wither when they fall *in petrosa*, that is, into inconstant souls quick to receive but also quick to discard the Word; grow but are soon choked

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<sup>2</sup> On the exegetical tradition associated with the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:3–8, 18–23, Mark 4:3–8, 13–20, and Luke 8:5–8, 11–15, see Wailes S.L., *Medieval Allegories of Jesus' Parables* (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: 1987) 96–103; on the formal structure of Matthew 13:1–23, and its problematic significance, see Marin L., "Versuch zur strukturalen Analyse des Gleichnis-Berichts Matthäus 13, 1–23", in Harnisch W. (ed.), *Die neutestamentliche Gleichnisforschung im Horizont von Hermeneutik und Literaturwissenschaft* [Wege der Forschung 575] (Darmstadt: 1982) 76–126. On the parable of the sower in Mark 4, see Klauck, H.-J., *Allegorie und Allegorese in synoptischen Gleichnistexten* (Münster: 1978) 185–209. On the Markan concept of the parable, as it relates to the distinction between metaphor and allegory, see Boucher M., *The Mysterious Parable: A Literary Study* (Washington, D.C.: 1977) 42–63. This distinction, now much contested, derives from Jülicher A., *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 2 vols. (Freiburg im Breisgau: 1888, 1899).

## DOMINICA SECVNDA POST PENTECOSTEN.

501

## A D N O T A T I O.

**A.** *Apharnaum, & domus Principis Pharisaeorum, ubi sanauit Christus hydropicum, vt probabiliter dici potest; nam tempus & locum non solet explicare Lucas, itaque coniectura vtendum est: ibi enim hanc & alias parabolas dixit Christus discumbens ad prandium cum Principe & aliis inuitatis & Discipulis. Vnam autem parabolam dixit inuitatis peculiariter, aliam Principi qui ipsum inuitauerat, hanc cuidam ex discumbentibus, omnes vero dictas voluit Discipulis: propterea habet ecclesiasticus vsus in Misa, hanc dictam Discipulis. Alia est hac parabola, alia Matthaei 22. cap. non solum quod cena hic est, illic prandium describitur, sed propter multa, quae in hac & in illa diuersa sunt. Esto igitur:*

August.

**B.** *Homo, qui parauerat cenam magnam, Deus est, qui benignissimè cum hominibus agens, paradisi caelestis cibos spirituales ac diuinos Ecclesia parauit. Spectat autem proprie parabola ad tempus noui Testamenti, extendi tamen ad omne tempus potest. Misit Christum Pater aeternus, qui formam serui accepit, & seruus dicitur: is vocat multo plures, quàm antea vocauerat Deus; & tamen caperunt simul omnes excusare suas occupationes, & beneficium detrectare: Christus enim vocat omnes in nouo Testamento, primum per se, deinde per suos.*

Cyrillus.

Iul. 41. &amp; 43.

**C.** *Homo, qui villam excusat se emisse, & exire, vt eam videat.*

**D.** *Alius, qui obtendit, quod iuga emerit boum quinque, ea se sequi, velle specimen de illis capere.*

**E.** *Alius: Vxorem, inquit, duxi, quocirca venire non possum. Alij duo rogant, vt se habeat excusatos, tertius, quasi iure suo contendit se esse excusatum. Huiusmodi sunt, qui variis huius saeculi occupationibus disenti, audiunt quidem & agnoscunt diuinam vocationem & gratiam, se qui tamen negligunt. Iam si hi male audiunt, si è cena excluduntur, quid illis fiet, qui vel audire nolunt vel oppugnant Dei in eos beneficentiam?*

**F.** *In plateis & vicis ciuitatis pauperes, debiles, cæci, claudi, quos seruus ad cenam vocat, qui audiunt & obsequuntur. Ii scilicet vocationem Dei sentiunt & sequuntur, qui paupertatem suam agnoscunt, se debiles, cæcos, se claudos esse, se bonis spiritualibus destitutos & egenos esse vident ac prostitentur.*

**G.** *Via & sepes, vnde pauperes, & debiles, & cæcos, & claudos, & quolibet, Gentiles scilicet, compellit (quod in ciuitate non fecerat) ad cenam intrare. Iudæos enim non compulsi Christus, qui plura habebant praesidia, vnde credere possent. Qui exira ciuitatem Dei viuentis erant, Gentiles compellit, extendens in illos misericordiae vim suauissimam.*

**H.** *Paratur Cena. Cibos enim & cenam parat Deus, cum & in hac vita, & in caelesti, placara nobis dona & premia reponit & pollicetur.*

## M E D I T A T I O.

**S**imus, Domine Deus, te nobis cenam in Ecclesia tua gratiarum & donorum tuorum paratum habere, scimus te cenam glorie & caelestium donorum reposuisse in caelo; cogitamus, legimus, loquimur identidem: verum adeo aride id facimus, adeo infructuose & ieiunè, vt aliis scripta & dicta illa esse videantur, non nobis: & plures adducimus excusationes, quàm illi homines, quos vocat Christus. Vbi enim illa legimus, vbi videmus nos ad cenam tuam vtramque, id est, ad resurrectionem & robur animæ, & spem vitæ sempiternæ tam ferio, tam vehementer vocari, oblitus sumus primum, & quasi excordes nihil profundius intelligimus, nihil corde percipimus: quod si quid lucis, si quid desiderij

boni exoriri cœperit, euertigò aliorum animarum diuertimus, alia agimus, alia videntur nobis vel magis vtilia, vel magis necessaria: breuiter, omnia nobis placent, omnia nos alliciunt, vt hoc ne agamus, vel omnino voluntate nostra fit, vt potiora prætermittamus. Quid? Non similiter atque illi excusatores excusamus nostras excusationes in inobedientis & peccatis nostris? Cum etiam nos Deus ad religiosum vitæ institutū & cenam vocare, primum respondimus, villam emi, quæ vel possideo bona temporalia, vel quæ appeto, & qui hæc sequuntur honores, tuz cœnæ; & regni caelorum desiderio antepono. Rursum iuga boum emi quinque: sensibus potius meis, quàm tuis reconditis & inexpectatis de-

Psal. 140.

Apoc. 2.

Fig. 7. Jerónimo Nadal, "Dominica secunda post Pentecosten. Adnotatio. Meditatio", in *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia* (Antwerp, Balthasar Moretus: 1607) 501. Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

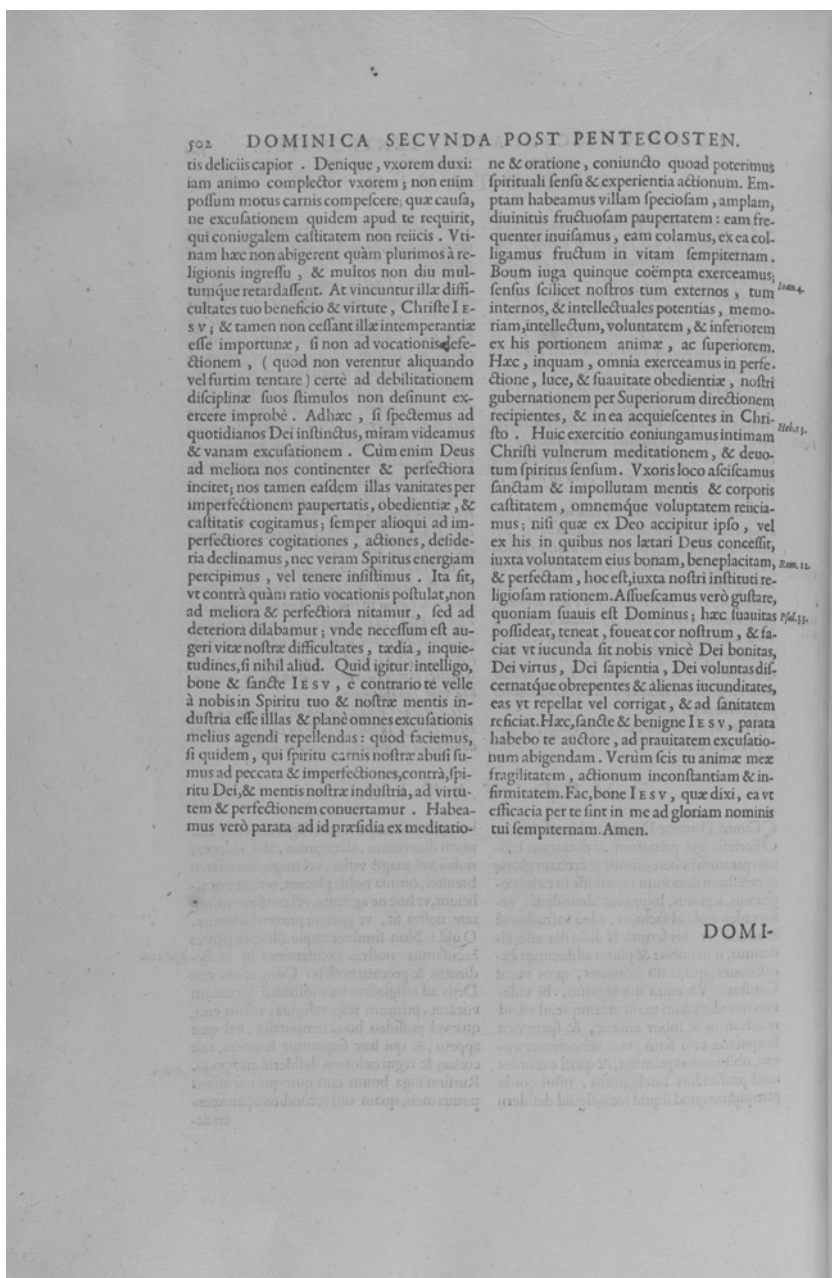


Fig. 8. Jerónimo Nadal, "Dominica secunda post Pentecosten. Meditatio", in *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia* (Antwerp, Balthasar Moretus: 1607) 502. Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

when they fall *in spinetum*, that is, into hearts initially receptive but then overmastered by quotidian matters and temporal concerns; and take root, flower, and fruit when they fall *in terram bonam*, that is, into good Christians who keep the faith, imitating Christ to the fullest extent of their abilities.<sup>3</sup> The farmer intrepidly sowing, his right arm extended, corresponds to the tiny figure of Christ, his right arm likewise extended toward the multitude he addresses.

Annotation A considers at great length why Christ chose to speak in parables, or as Nadal puts it, how and why they must be regarded as a great mystery and singular benefaction (*'magno mysterio, singulari beneficio'*).<sup>4</sup> Nadal traces this usage to the Saviour's foreknowledge of his heterogeneous audience's hidden motives and unvoiced attitudes toward the Gospel. Having performed miracles that divinely attested the truth of his teaching, Jesus drew large crowds that flocked to hear him speak. They comprised men of good will and of bad, and so, on account of this, he utilized two kinds of speech that served explicitly to distinguish between the two groups. For the well-disposed, there was no need of figured speech, and on those rare occasions when he thus addressed them, he also explained the figures he had fashioned for their benefit (*'propter hos quidem, vel usus non esset figurato sermone, vel illum explicasset in ipsa concione'*). For the ill-disposed, on the contrary, he spoke in parables, and what is more, left his similitudes unexplained, rather than scattering pearls before swine (*'sed illi in causa fuerunt ut loqueretur per parabolas, atque ut ne publice eas exponeret: ne scilicet [...] margaritas spargeret ante porcos'*).<sup>5</sup> According to this logic, parables are exclusionary instruments that insulate the laity from truths they are unable or unwilling to accept. But Nadal further discriminates between parabolic and non-parabolic speech, as follows: '[Jesus] thought it sufficient to teach clearly (*'clare'*) those things necessary to spreading the Gospel; and what pertained to spiritual doctrine (*'doctrinam spiritualem'*), he revealed to the disciples

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<sup>3</sup> Nadal Jerónimo, *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia quae in sacrosancto Missae sacrificio toto anno leguntur: [...] Editio ultima: In qua Sacer Textus ad emendationem Bibliorum Sixti V. et Clementis VIII. restitutus* (Antwerp, Balthasar Moretus: 1607) 66–68. As stated in the title, this is the third and final edition, published under the auspices of the Officina Plantiniana.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* On the rhetorical form and function of the parable, see Rau E., *Reden in Vollmacht. Hintergrund, Form und Anliegen der Gleichnisse Jesu* (Göttingen: 1990) 18–107.

separately. Therefore, with respect to speaking in parables, Christ ascribed the cause to those unable to hear in another manner ('aliter audire'), who instead of listening to him displayed a wilful contrariety and sought to impede the Spirit discoursing'.<sup>6</sup> Here Nadal identifies parables with a higher register of evangelical truth – *doctrinam spiritualem* – addressed specifically to faithful initiates capable of discerning the mysteries and benefactions that Christ promulgates figuratively ('figurato sermone'), which is to say, with a view to being hearkened spiritually ('aliter audire').

If, as Nadal implies, Christ reserves perspicuous speech for men of good will, he yet distinguishes between their faculties of discernment. The parables that foreclose the disaffected also delimit the chosen few who show themselves able and willing to grasp the principles of faith: 'For this was a mystery, and more than this, a privilege, that they who brought goodness of spirit to bear when presented with a guiding principle about which they might ask the reason for the similitude or parable, should apprehend it and look to be instructed, as did the apostles. And it may be believed that other auditors likewise desired explanation of the parables, either from Christ himself or from the apostles, and also that they were thus moved to follow Christ'.<sup>7</sup> Nadal imagines an unbroken chain of parabolic exegesis, passed on from Christ to the apostles, from them to other inquisitive recipients of the *rationes similitudinis et parabola*e, which serves to differentiate true churchmen from the congregations they guide. He calls this attitude to parabolic instruction the providence of the Church and the apostles ('Ecclesiae providentia & Apostolorum') and purports especially to ascertain it in Saint Paul and Dionysius the Areopagite.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the reluctance of Christ and his Church openly to convey

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.: 'Sat ergo habuit, si quae ad fundandum Evangelium erant necessaria, ea clare doceret; & quae ad doctrinam spiritualem alia pertinebant, ea discipulis seorsum aperiret. Propterea, cur in parabolis loqueretur, causam Christus retulit ad eos qui non poterant, aliter audire, & contrariam afferebant animi dispositionem ad audiendum Christum, qui & obicem opponebant spiritui qui loquebatur'.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.: 'Mysterium igitur hoc fuit. Beneficium autem, ut qui boni animi aliquid afferebant, hi cum principium aliquod ipsis offerretur unde interrogarent (quod habet ratio similitudinis & parabola)e illud arriperent, & curarent doceri; quod fecerunt Apostoli. Et credi potest alios auditores itidem petiisse expositionem parabolarum, vel a Christo ipso, vel ab Apostolis; & inde etiam motos ut Christum sequerentur'.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.: 'Fuit autem haec semper Ecclesiae providentia & Apostolorum, ea usus est Paulus, ea Dionysius Areopagita'.



spiritual truths to enemies of the *doctrinam spiritualem*, that is, their insistence on couching this doctrine in parables, ensures that these adversaries of the Gospel have less opportunity to contravene it, falling less deeply into a state of mortal sin.<sup>9</sup>

Nadal's prefatory remarks on the parable lay the groundwork for a discussion of its visual character, as we shall see. For now, I want simply to call attention to the pressure of choice Nadal places on the viewer of *imago* 38 [Fig. 2]: where should he look, and how should he read what he sees, given that the captions and their order of precedence do not jibe with the indicators of pictorial importance? The former set the annotative sequence: they begin with Jesus, whose name, engraved in Roman capitals, presides over the other inscriptions. The position of the Holy Name above *agricola* and of the verb *docet* above *faciens* intimates that the one stands for the other in a double analogy of preacher and preaching with sower and sowing. If the captions start with Jesus, citing him as source of the images described in captions B-F, they end with Christ the exegete, who explicates what he has just taught. And yet in the *imago* the solitary figure of the sower immediately commands attention, unlike the distant, diminutive figure of Christ: centred on the picture's vertical, horizontal, and diagonal axes, he dominates the foreground, walking briskly along an oblique furrow that leads into the space of the beholder. Strong chiaroscuro and the cast shadow doubling his silhouette make him even more conspicuous. By contrast, Christ preaching is far less visible, and the panoramic landscape with its variable terrain provides many dispersive points of interest, few of which guide the eyes back to the sermon from the ship. Even so, the discerning viewer, if he is sufficiently alert, will detect the visual cues binding scenes A and B: placed on the same vertical, Jesus and the sower gesture similarly toward the left; the curving hedge of brambles, whither seeds are sown, is like the curving crowd of auditors, whither the sermon is broadcast. The carters and caravan converging on the sower from left and right in the plane of the image resemble the crowd and the disciples flanking Christ, their gaze cast

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.: 'Nam cum non essent apertam rem recepturi, sed potius oppugnaturi, providebat Christus ne divinam doctrinam conculcarent, & se, vel Apostolos virulentius persequerentur. Consulebat igitur immeritis & ingratis hominibus, ne gravius peccarent, & ut minore cum poena perirent'.

in his direction. The diagonal oars and rigging that point his way echo the diagonal furrows that mark the sower's motion.

The difficulty of describing these analogies and of reconciling the orders of the captions and the image correlates to the difficulty of discerning the relation between the story the parable transmits *clare* and the *doctrinam spiritualem* that it conveys *figurato sermone*, by means of figured speech. The viewer who looks through the sower to Christ, keeping in mind the analogy between the parable's source and its protagonist, implicitly draws a parallel between himself and the disciples. In effect, he analogizes their ability to search the parabolic image to his own faculty of interpretation, which perceives the parable differently ('*aliter audire*') and reveals the *rationem similitudinis et parabola*e that is its *raison d'être*.<sup>10</sup> Although this parable comes first neither in the harmonic sequence, where it follows the parables told on Mount Tabor (*imagines* 19–23), nor in the liturgical sequence, where the closely related parable of the tares and the Septuagesima Sunday parable of the vineyard workers precede it (chapters 15 and 16), the *imago parabola sementis* is distinctive, for, viewed through the lens of annotation A, it compels us to gauge our relation to the parabolic image, as this bears ultimately on our relation to Christ. To see it superficially is to claim identity with the *homines malae voluntatis*; to see its great mystery is to affirm one's allegiance to the *homines bonae voluntatis*, amongst whom the most judicious and farsighted are the *discipuli* and *apostoli*.<sup>11</sup> Operative here is a thematic of conversion that connects the devotee to Christ by evoking the translative and transformative meanings of the term *conversio*: we begin to transform ourselves into his true followers when, having exercised the faculty of discernment, we come to recognize how the parabolic image of the sower translates the evangelical task of seeding the Gospel.

<sup>10</sup> On the structure of parabolic analogy, see Fuchs E., "Die Analogie", in Harnish W. (ed.), *Die neutestamentliche Gleichnisforschung* 1–19; and Jüngel E., "Das Evangelium als Analoge Rede von Gott", in Harnish W. (ed.) *Die neutestamentliche Gleichnisforschung* 340–366.

<sup>11</sup> Nadal, *Adnotationes et meditationes* 69: 'Nam cum omnem doctrinam suam miraculis confirmaret (hoc est divino testimonio, quod erat in miraculis) & ad eius doctrinam confluerent, partim qui erant malae, partim qui erant bonae voluntatis homines: propter hos quidem, vel usus non esset figurato sermone, vel illum explicasset in ipsa concione: sed illi in causa fuerunt ut loqueretur per parabolas, atque ut ne publice eas exponeret: ne scilicet (quod docuerat Apostolos) sanctum daret carnibus, & margaritas spargeret ante porcos'.

This must be why Nadal associates the parable of the sower with three other parables whose importance Christ signals by admonishing his auditors to hear truly, not with the ears of the body but with the true ears of the heart and spirit (*'ut veris auribus, hoc est, cordis & spiritus audiant'*). For Nadal, these complementary parables, linked by the exhortation, *'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear'*, unite the clerical community in the performance of a common task – the cultivation of the spiritual life, as modelled parabolically by Christ. Noting that the command is shouted out in Luke 8, Nadal underscores its urgency here and in Matthew 11:12, Mark 7:16, and Luke 14:35: *'For [Christ the Word] wanted the meaning of the parable to enter our hearts, there to be imprinted ('imprimi') from out of the boundless model of himself'*.<sup>12</sup> In Matthew 11, the persecution of John the Baptist and his fellow prophets under the Old Law functions as a parable for the coming of the Messiah, on behalf of whom they have prophesied and suffered. This parable calls for the recognition of Christ as Saviour, which avowal Nadal construes as the beginning of the spiritual life (*'principium vitae spiritualis'*). In Mark 7, the scribes and Pharisees, whose strict ritual observances are seen to contravene the commandments of God, become a parable for the truth that nothing external, only what arises from within, can defile a man. Having been realized, Nadal avers, this axiom shows the way to resist temptation and preserve the spiritual life (*'viam superandi tentationes, & conservandi vitam spiritualem'*). In Luke 14, the parables of the man who reckons the cost of building a tower and of the king who reckons the cost of a war signify the necessity of grasping fully what it means to follow Christ, bearing his cross. Nadal designates knowledge of this kind as the perfection of the spiritual life (*'de perfectione vitae disserit'*). In this context, the parable of the sower stands for the mobilization of heart and spirit as instruments of discernment, through the application of which Gospel parables may be appreciated as the supreme source of spiritual teaching. This parable teaches above all that Christ the Word embeds himself in the parabolic form, bodying forth truths that his adherents must strive to decode and disseminate:

For the rest, all men, in like manner all offices of the Church, are to be found in this evangelical parable, and so too are described the things that

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.: *'Voluit namque intelligentiam parabola e sui infinita productione ad corda nostra penetrare & imprimi'*.

encumber in whatsoever office. For in the first place, all are taught not to avert one's spirit from divine inspiration, which is the word of God and the divine seed: lest it happen that they fail to understand with the heart, the seed is snatched away by devils ready to devour it, and the foundation of the spiritual edifice perishes. Whence we conclude that whosoever neglects or disdains to hear the doctrine of Christ and receive it in his heart, perishes, whether he be a believer or an infidel.<sup>13</sup>

Nadal's conception of the parable's form and function stems primarily from the commentaries on Matthew 13 and Luke 8 in the *Glossa ordinaria*, where the parable is defined as a device used by Christ to demarcate the literalism of the Old Law, anchored in extraneous circumstances, from the figurativeness of the New, which conjoins external to internal matters, infusing mere things with spiritual meanings ('externis interna contulit, ad quae Iudaei non intraverunt, foris in litera fixi').<sup>14</sup> Christ devises parables to accommodate his multifarious followers, whose varied desires and inclinations require equally diverse methods of instruction. However, he addresses them mainly to his disciples, speaking *manifeste* to the general public and *parabolice* to his closest supporters, signalling by the phrase 'he that hath ears to hear, let him hear' that what he says is meant spiritually ('mysticum quod dicitur, insinuat'), or as Jerome puts it, that the intellect must seek another sense in the parable's words: "And he spoke to them many things in parables": It does not say "all", because had he spoken only in parables, the multitude would have gone away empty, having profited not at all, and so he rendered some things in parables – namely, what counted as mysteries fit to be known not by the people, but solely by the disciples [...]. Other things he preached openly, so that the multitude could take them in'.<sup>15</sup> Espousing faith and devotion, the

<sup>13</sup> Nadal, *Adnotationes et meditationes* 69–70: 'Ceterum praesentis Evangelij parabola omnes homines, tum status omnes Ecclesiae, instituuntur; & in quovis statu quae impediunt, designantur. Nam primum docentur omnes, ut a divina inspiratione, quae est verbum Dei & divinum semen, animum ne avertant: ne ita fiat ut corde non intelligant, & rapiatur illud semen a praeparatis ad escam rugientibus Diabolis, & pereat fundamentum spiritualis aedificij. Unde intelligimus perire illos, qui vel negligunt, vel contemnunt audire Christi doctrinam & corde recipere, sive infideles, sive fideles sint'.

<sup>14</sup> *Glos. ord. Matthaei Cap. XIII. De Lyra*, in *Biblia Sacra cum glossis interlineari, ordinaria, ex Nicolai Lyrani Postilla, eiusdemque Moralitatibus, Burgensis Additionibus, & Thoringi Replicis*, 7 vols. (Venice, Società dell'Aquila [Giovanni Varisco & Comp.]: 1588) 5: fol. 44r A.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 44r B: 'Non dicit omnia, quia si omnia loqueretur in parabolis, multitudo recessisset vacua sine utilitate, & ideo aliqua parabolice loquebatur ea, scilicet

disciples were given to discern the true sense of scripture ('intellectus versus sacrae scripturae'), as this parable, the first to be expounded by Christ, makes clear in anticipation of Luke 24:45: 'Then he opened their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures'. The *Glossa* also construes parables as defensive, indeed offensive instruments, mustered up to divide believers from disbelievers.<sup>16</sup> If anything, the *Glossa* makes this case more emphatically than Nadal does, arguing that the opacity of parables was designed to forestall conversion: their ill-disposed auditors, as if struck blind, failed to recognize the truths thus veiled, and consequently, refused to believe in Christ whom they ultimately crucified. God had blinded them ('excaecavit oculos eorum'), as the *Glossa* avows, superimposing Christ's trenchant reading of Isaiah 6:9 in John 12:40, onto his gentler paraphrase of this prophecy in Matthew 13:15, where it is cited to justify parabolic usage. Affrighted by the miraculous events following the Resurrection, they later realized the enormity of their transgression, regretting with a heightened compunction their initial failure to understand.<sup>17</sup> On this account, the parables first averted belief in order finally to secure and strengthen penitential faith in Christ.

Most importantly for Nadal, the *Glossa* singles out Matthew 13:6, 'Blessed are your eyes, because they see', as the scriptural locus for the notion of spiritual sight. Whereas the blindness of the Jews arose from their incredulity, the clarity of vision shown by the apostles resulted from their readiness to discern the latent power of divinity, while closely observing the external deeds of Christ ('non solum facta exteriora conspiciendo sed virtutem divinitatis latentem intelligendo'). As they saw spiritually, so also did they hear, or again, what their ears heard, their faith led them internally to affirm ('non solum audiendo exterius, sed etiam per fidem assentiendo interius').<sup>18</sup> In turn, spiritual discernment originates in the realization that every *res* can be viewed in several ways: it has multiple *significationes*, as becomes apparent when the parable of the sower, the metaphor of stony ground in particular, is compared to the imagery of other parables. The gloss on

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quae erant secreta, & non debebant sciri a turba, sed solum a discipulis [...]. Alia autem loquebatur manifeste, ita quod turba poterat capere'.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., fol. 44v G.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., fol. 44v E.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., fol. 44v H.

Matthew 13:5–6, ‘And other some fell upon stony ground [...] and because they had not root, they withered away’, makes this case:

Stony places need quickly to germinate, but the root remains unfixed, for the soil is shallow, that is, there is too little longing for salvation. In this, the Lord’s exposition, we learn that no thing signifies always in the same way (*quia res non semper in eadem significatione ponuntur*). For the rock stands here for hardness of heart, the earth for softness, and the sun for the heat of persecution. But elsewhere the sun is construed as good, as in ‘the righteous shine like the sun’, and the foundation stone for strength of faith, and the earth for worldly thoughts.<sup>19</sup>

The emphasis on things seen and the multiplicity of their signifieds connects to three crucial points codified in the *Glossa*, which Nadal develops into a parabolic image-theory. First, the circumstances in which the parable of the sower was delivered demonstrate that parables consist not only of the Lord’s words but also of his deeds (‘*nota non solum verba domini, sed & facta, parabolas esse*’). These *facta* are mystical signs (‘*signa mysticarum rerum*’): beyond the scope of the multitude, they require to be seen closely by the disciples and interpreted accordingly.<sup>20</sup> As the *Glossa* avers with reference to Luke 8:5, ‘The sower went out to sow his seed’, Christ’s progress from shore to sea and action of climbing into the ship conveyed corporeally what his parabolic sermon conveyed verbally (‘*id ipsum situ corporis, quod processu sermonis insinuans*’). Both the enacted image and the spoken image signify that the Son of God has entered the world to sow the Word (‘*venit in mundum, ut testimonium perhiberet veritati*’).<sup>21</sup> Second, just as Christ expounded the parable of the sower not word for word (‘*secundum singula verba*’) but substantively (‘*sed summam*

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., fol. 44r A: ‘*Petrosa cito quaerunt germinare, sed non figitur radix quia non est alta terra, id est quia parum inest desiderij salutaris. In hac expositione domini discimus, quia res non semper in eadem significatione ponuntur. Nam petra hic pro duricia, terra pro lenitate mentis, sol pro fervore persecutionis. Cum sol alibi in bono–Fulgebunt iusti sicut sol–& petra in fundamento, pro fortitudine fidei, & terra pro terrenis cogitationibus*’. On the parable as comparative metaphor, see Funk R.W., “Das Gleichnis als Metapher”, in Harnisch (ed.), *Des neutestamentliche Gleichnisforschung* 20–58; Sellin G., “Allegorie und ‘Gleichnis’: Zur Formenlehre des synoptischen Gleichnisse”, in *ibid.*, 367–429, esp. 376–389; Westermann C., *Vergleiche und Gleichnisse im Alten und Neuen Testament* [*Calwer Theologische Monographien* 14] (Stuttgart: 1984) 116–121; and Harnisch W., *Die Gleichniserzählungen Jesu. Eine hermeneutische Einführung* (Göttingen: 1985) 109–176.

<sup>20</sup> *Glos. ord. Matthaei Cap. XIII. De Lyra*, in *Biblia Sacra cum glossis*, 5: fol. 44v E.

<sup>21</sup> *Glos. ord. Lucae Cap. VIII. Glos. ord.*, in *Biblia Sacra cum glossis*, 5: fol. 146r B.

sententiae'), focussing on its essential meaning, so in this way must all parables be interpreted figuratively rather than literally.<sup>22</sup> The parable of the cornerstone (Psalm 117:22 and Matthew 21:42) is adduced: 'But the parable was the story of the Lord himself, about which it is never necessary that the things said be shown literally to have been transpired: [as for example] Christ is the stone anointed by Jacob, the stone rejected by the builders, which has been made the head of the corner. But the former was done in deed ('in rebus gestis factum'), the latter only predicted in figures ('in figuris praedictum'), seeing as the author of the one wrote of past things, the prophet of the other only of things to come'.<sup>23</sup> In sum, the parable is made up of figurative images that must be read as such. Third, if the parable is firmly to be grasped, its innermost secrets fathomed, then it must be entered attentively by means of prayer and meditation ('occulta scripturae penetralia, orando & meditando intremus').<sup>24</sup> This sort of meditative engagement cleaves closely to parabolic images whose spiritual meaning it is incumbent upon the votary to infer, as the gloss on Luke 8:9, 'And his disciples asked him what this parable might be', strongly suggests. The closing reference is to Psalm 118:18: 'Open thou my eyes ('revela oculos meos'): and I will consider the wondrous things of thy law'.<sup>25</sup>

Let us return now to annotation A on the parable of the sower, which describes its visual force and universal meaning, putting forward the mystery of the Incarnation as the grounds for the parabolic image. Nadal's argument attaches to the three points above. He points out, first of all, that the parable of the sower, alone amongst all parables, begins with the injunction to behold: 'But why is it that *Ecce* is annexed to this parable and no other, just as if to a great and novel thing worthy of admiration?'<sup>26</sup> The answer lies in the principle

<sup>22</sup> *Glos. ord. Matthaei Cap. XIII. De Lyra*, in *Biblia Sacra cum glossis*, 5: fol. 44v F.

<sup>23</sup> *Glos. ord. Matthaei Cap. XIII. De Lyra*, in *Biblia Sacra cum glossis*, fols. 44v F–45r A: 'Ipsius autem domini narratio parabola fuit, de qua nunquam exigitur, ut etiam ad literam facta monstrentur, quae sermone proferuntur: Christus est lapis unctus a Iacob, & lapis reprobatus ab aedificantibus, qui factus est in caput anguli. Sed illud etiam in rebus gestis factum est. Hoc autem tantum in figuris praedictum. Illud quippe scripsit narrator rerum praeteritarum, hoc praenuntiator tantummodo futurorum'.

<sup>24</sup> *Glos. ord. Lucae Cap. VIII. Glos. ord.*, in *Biblia Sacra cum glossis*, 5: fol. 146r C.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Nadal, *Adnotationes et meditationes* 69: 'Sed quid est, quod ad hanc, & ad aliam nullam parabola adiungitur *Ecce*; quasi ad rem magnam, novam, & admiratione dignam?'

of parable-formation, that this parable envisages as consonant with the principle of *manifestatio*, the bringing forth of the Word, expressed visibly in the person of Christ. Nadal bases his argument on Christ's use of the verb *exiit* – 'went forth' – in the parable's opening line, 'Behold the sower went forth to sow'. The parable of the sower is universal, encompassing all the mysteries figured in the parables of Christ, because it describes Christ the sower going forth in two senses: the eternal generation of the Word, the Son of God, who came forth at the dawn of the days of eternity ('*filij Dei aeternam generationem [...] quo ab initio a diebus aeternitatis Verbum Dei prodiit*'), and the incarnation of the Word, the Son of Man, who came forth into the world, having been made man in the womb of the Virgin and thence been born as the foremost fruit of the lineage of men ('*reliquorum omnium fructum [...] quo venit in mundum, & semen infinitum in utero Virginis sacrosanctae homo factum est*').<sup>27</sup> Since the Incarnation is the work of all the Trinity, reasons Nadal, the Word of God was sowing himself in and through this great mystery, which is to say that the parable of the sower, to the extent that it portrays Christ, concerns the self-sowing of the Word ('*seminans in sua incarnatione fuit idem Dei Verbum*'). As such, it encapsulates in brief the coming forth of all other mysteries, of all Gospel fruit, and hence, of all parables.<sup>28</sup> Nadal is claiming that the parable of the sower represents the power of self-representation at the heart of all the mysteries, Gospels, and parables by which God communicates his discernible presence to humankind. The vocative '*Ecce*' is used to indicate that the call to see what this parable bodies forth, in fact applies to all parables: 'Wherefore the *Ecce*, since it belongs to this most excellent parable, from thence appertains to all parables. In other respects, the principle that brings forth the Word of God ('*ratione productionis Verbi Dei*'), affirming its divine manifestation ('*manifestationem*') in the splendour of sanctity and infinite light of divinity, stands forth visibly in every created word of God and divinely revealed doctrine, so that the divine virtue made visible in that principle may be put forward for the salvation of souls'.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.: '*Ex his autem alia omnia prodeunt mysteria, omnis fructus Evangelij Dei, hinc omnes parabola*'.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.: '*Quare illud Ecce, ad hanc cum attineat excellentissimam, ex eo ad omnes parabolas pertinet. Ceterum, ut ex ratione productionis Verbi Dei, quae manifestationem dicit in splendoribus sanctitatis, & infinita luce divinitatis in Deo; ita in omni*



As Nadal contends, the generation ('productio') of the Word asserts the principle of making visible ('manifestatio') that likewise expresses itself in every word begotten of God and divinely brought to light. On this account, the productive principle ('ratio productionis') that makes divine virtue perceptible in Christ also makes it discernible in his every word, not least the parables. Parables originate in this logic of divine manifestation, for they consist of words that visibly figure the nature of Christ. Chief amongst the parables, of course, is the parable of the sower: by showing Christ the sower going forth to sow the Word, it signifies – indeed makes visible – the principle of divine generation that binds the production of the Word and the production of parabolic exempla. Or, put differently, it consists of images that portray the very possibility of promulgating the Word by visible means. This process of parable formation, part and parcel of the larger process of *manifestatio* that represents divine virtue to human sense, provides the basis for Nadal's image theory of the parable.<sup>30</sup>

Implicit in Nadal's thinking here is the notion, codified as we have seen in the *Glossa*, that Christ's method of teaching with parables is itself parabolic, in the sense that it supplies – or better, enacts – the meaning encoded by the parable. In other words, what Christ does from shipboard is the signified that the parable figuratively rehearses. We might put this in typological terms: the giving of a parabolic sermon is the antitype that fulfills the type comprised by the parable of the sower. The analogy between Christ and the sower in *imago* 38 plays upon this parabolic relation between *factum* and *verbum*. The second of the *Glossa*'s three points, noted above, also applies: if the substantive meaning of the parable is *manifestatio*, as this relates to

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verbo Dei creato, & divinitus revelata doctrina, illa extat ratio, ut divina virtus in ea manifestetur & exeratur ad animorum salutem'.

<sup>30</sup> Nadal's emphasis on the parable's visual force and meditative character recalls Erasmus's reading of Matthew 13:1–12 in the *Paraphrasis in Matthaeum*. Erasmus argues that Christ prefers this 'kind of speech', because it 'secretly censures each person's conscience by means of a picture', inciting the 'desire for learning and inquiry'; see Sider R.D. (ed.) – Simpson D. (ed.-trans.-annot.), *Collected Works of Erasmus*. Vol. 45, *New Testament Scholarship. Paraphrase on Matthew* (Toronto – Buffalo – London: 2008) 208–209. In the *Paraphrasis in Marcum*, however, Erasmus construes the parable as a species of sensory paradox: using their ears and eyes attentively, the 'spectators of [Jesus'] words' shall recognize how his parables are 'subtle in their simplicity, wise in their foolishness, lucid in their obscurity'; see Sider R.D. (ed.) – Rummel E. (trans.-annot.), *Collected Works of Erasmus*. Vol. 49, *New Testament Scholarship. Paraphrase on Mark* (Toronto – Buffalo – London: 1988) 56.

divine *productio*, its secondary meaning, vested in the imagery of the four types of sown ground, has to do with the various kinds of response the evangelical seeds beget. The pathway signifies rejection of the Word; stony ground the hardness of heart that impedes devotion; the thorny hedgerow the importunate flesh that suffocates good intentions; and good soil the soul imprinted by Christ, the heart made pliant and obedient, and the mind alerted to the parable's meaning.<sup>31</sup> For the laity, the parable further teaches that once the Word is sown, constant recourse to Christ overcomes all the *impedimenta* blocking its reception.<sup>32</sup> For the clergy, the continual practice of poverty, chastity, and obedience, combined with the gift of divine inspiration, ensures the parable's salutary effects.<sup>33</sup>

The third of the *Glossa*'s points – that the parable must be meditated if its spiritual doctrine is fully to be understood – constitutes the principal theme of the *meditatio* following the *adnotationes*. The difference between the discursive annotations and the figurative meditation recalls the distinction made between the two modes of sermon preached by Christ, who speaks *clare* to his general audience and *aliter* to his disciples. Seen in this light, the meditative exercise confirms our likeness to the select group of followers who strove to assimilate the parables aimed at them. In allusion to Luke 8:8, Christ's emphatic call to hear the parable spiritually, Nadal entreats him to do now what he did then – to cry out to us, expound the parable, sow his doctrine deep within our hearts, and thus convert us into *terram bonam & optimam*, ready to receive and grow the Word. The call to heed the parable is likened to a two-edged sword that figures the virtue and mercy of Christ: lively, efficacious, and penetrating, the blade is seen and felt to cut deeply, as it transmits the meaning of the parable and intensifies our desire to apprehend it. The image of cutting doubles as the image of planting: 'Nor let us receive the word superficially: for thither the demon easily flies and snatches it away, and bad thoughts also tread it under foot. On the contrary, let us receive the word profoundly, lest the heat of temptation reach it [...]. Then having rejected all noisome

<sup>31</sup> Nadal, *Adnotationes et meditationes* 69–70.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 70: 'ut illas omnes superet difficultates, & corde recipiat verbum Dei, & devotionem addat in mediis impedimentis & distractionibus'.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.: 'Quod concilium si accipiat, fiet primum ut inspirationes Dei corde recipiantur; corda praeterea ut emolliantur ad devotionem intimam, & statum etiam perfectionis capessendum; denique paupertas, & castitas, & obedientia animo proponatur'.

impediments, whether consoled or desolated, let us receive the celestial virtue of the word of God into the soil of our heart: let us cooperate with the word in Christ'.<sup>34</sup> The *impedimenta* to which Nadal refers are dryness of the heart, errors of the will, and distractions of mind and sense, which for the clergy hinder perfection of the religious life, and for the laity hamper any attempts to emulate the virtues of the clerical state. That the *verbum Dei* may console or desolate indicates the power of meditation to transform, either by making us aware of our distance from Christ or by uniting us more closely to him. These effects ensue as a consequence of our total identification with (one is tempted to say grounding in) the parabolic imagery devised by Christ to distinguish the kinds and degrees of receptive and unreceptive souls. The *meditatio* has as its primary function the making of these images transparent to ourselves.

*Imago* 39 illustrates the parable of the tares, recounted immediately after the parable of the sower and its exposition [Fig. 3].<sup>35</sup> In private, Christ also expounds this similitude, which describes the two kingdoms populating the earth, the one seeded by God, the other by Satan, and their fates at the Last Judgment. In the far distance, though closer than in *imago* 38, Christ preaches shoreward (A). The parable unfolds in the fore- and middle-ground: the paterfamilias orders good seeds to be sown (B); the devil sows the same field by night, while the labourers sleep (C); the seeds sprout, and the plants grow (D); the servants, surprised to find tares amongst the wheat, offer to eradicate them (E); the paterfamilias prohibits them from doing so (F); the wheat fully matures (G); the paterfamilias commands that the tares be collected and incinerated (H–I), and the wheat gathered and deposited in the storehouse (K). In Matthew 13:37–43, Christ explains that the paterfamilias is he himself, the Son of Man, who sows good seed, the 'children of the kingdom'; the devil is the enemy who sows tares, the 'children of the wicked one'. The servants are the angels who shall gather sinners at the end of time and cast them into hell. The storehouse is the kingdom

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 70: 'Nec ad superficiem verbum recipiamus: eo enim advolat facile daemon, & verbum eripit; cogitationes item pravae verbum conculcant. Sed profunde verbum recipiamus, ne ardor tentationis eo pertingat. [...] Reiectis igitur noxiis omnibus impedimentis, sive desolati sumus, sive consolati, in terra cordis nostri verbi Dei virtutem caelestem recipiamus: illi cooperemur in Christo'.

<sup>35</sup> On the exegetical tradition associated with the parable of the tares in Matthew 13:24–20, 36–43, see Wailes, *Allegories of Jesus' Parables* 103–108.

of heaven.<sup>36</sup> Jesus explicitly compares the householder to himself, and *imago* 39 clearly expresses this analogy by positioning Jesus in scene A and the householder in scenes F and H on the diagonal that connects the print's upper left and lower right corners. All three figures address auditors, making a gesture of instruction, and Jesus and the householder in scene F share the same three-quarter pose, though the former sits, and the latter stands. Special emphasis is placed on the exchange between the householder and his servants in scenes E and F. The gestures of the standing servant are both subtle and pronounced: he points toward the field of new wheat, but also the mattocks lying beside a cleancut stump, thus relaying his intention of cutting down and rooting out the unforeseen weeds. By doffing his hat and bending slightly, he also expresses his readiness to defer to his master's command that the tares be spared until the harvest. This scene correlates to annotation F, in which it receives special attention.

The annotations, A and F especially, explore the dual aspect of parabolic interpretation laid down in the *Glossa*: on the one hand, Christ deigned to expound such parables as that of the sower or the tares in order to show that since they operate figuratively, their significance must be sought even when he declines to explicate them ('rerum significationes etiam in his, quae exponere noluit, quaerendas esse doceret'); on the other hand, in those instances when he supplies the meaning, his method of exegesis must be followed scrupulously ('ne vel aliud vel plus vel minus intelligere velimus, quam ab eo expositum est').<sup>37</sup> With this twofold axiom in mind, Nadal sets about the task of construing the tares, which Chrysostomus interprets somewhat differently from Basil. Chrysostomus, in line with Theophrastus, asserts that tares sometimes transmute into wheat, and vice versa, a misconception that Basil would seem also, at least initially, to endorse. For Chrysostomus, this is the reason why the paterfamilias forestalls his men when they offer to destroy the tares: the wicked may be converted into the good and must thus be spared. Basil, however, if read carefully, proves to

<sup>36</sup> "Evangelium Missae. Matth. XIII", in Nadal, *Adnotationes et meditationes* 60: 'Qui seminat bonum semen, est filius hominis. Ager autem, est mundus. Bonum vero semen, hi sunt filij Regni. Zizania autem, filij sunt nequam. Inimicus autem, qui seminauit ea, est Diabolus. Messis vero, consummatio saeculi est. Messores autem, Angeli sunt. Sicut ergo colliguntur zizania, & igni comburuntur; sic erit in consummatione saeculi'.

<sup>37</sup> *Glos. ord. Lucae Cap. VIII. Glos. ord.*, in *Biblia Sacra cum glossis*, 5: fol. 146r C–146v E.

oppose this view, avowing that tares are a separate species entirely, which grows from its own seed rather than transforming into or from wheat. This is the right conclusion, states Nadal, because it concurs both with the imagery of the parable and the exposition offered by Christ ('ex descriptione parabolae, atque eius expositione'), who plainly differentiates between the children of the kingdom and the children of the wicked one.<sup>38</sup> On this basis, thinking himself in step with Christ, he exercises the license of the exegete, specifying an additional meaning that associates the tares with heretics and the paterfamilias with the Church. This reading of the *imago* converts it into an allegory of the Church's dealings with heresy: 'Mixed with bread, tares inebriate; they affect the head with heavy sleep and dizziness and cloud the vision, which things clearly express the effects of our tares – of heresy principally, but also of all sin. Nor are many tares needed for such evils to appear. For all heresy and all sin cause extreme corruption of the spirit, and the more copious [the sin], the more severe [the corruption]'.<sup>39</sup>

How then to explain the forbearance counselled by the householder in Matthew 13:30, 'Suffer both to grow until the harvest'. Nadal speculates that Christ is referring to the situations in which, heretics being difficult to identify, innocent Catholics may inadvertently be condemned, or alternatively, to the circumstances of state that prevent some Catholic rulers from prosecuting heresy without grave geopolitical consequences. For these and other reasons, the Church sometimes leaves heretics to the final judgment of Christ, but Nadal finds it inconceivable that Christ the paterfamilias would refrain from extirpating heresy, were the wheat and the tares, the orthodox and the herodox, not mixed together. His primary warrant for this point of view is the curious fact that Christ leaves verse 30 unexplained, as well as verses 28–29, in which the servants ask if they should gather up the tares, and Christ answers, 'No, lest perhaps gathering up the cockle, you root up the wheat also together with it'. For Nadal, Christ's insistence on speaking purely in the parabolic mode authorizes the Church

<sup>38</sup> Nadal, *Adnotationes et meditationes* 61.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.: 'Porro lolij si multum accipiat panis, inebriat; caput gravi somno & vertigine afficit, visum obtenebrat: quae nostri zizanij declarant effectus diserte, haereseos praecipue, tum omnis etiam peccati. Nec multum necessum est adesse zizanij, ut haec mala proveniant. Omnis enim haeresis, & omne peccatum, illas generat pessimas animi depravationes; eo copiosius, quo est gravius'.

to interpret what he has stated figuratively and in no other way. In this instance, hermeneutic license, the right of judging the parable's meaning, signifies by analogy the Church's right of judging heresy, namely, of executing or forestalling capital punishment:

In fine, [the Church] executes nothing against heretics that is not sanctioned by the doctrine and teaching of Christ. Christ seems to have left to his spouse the Church judgment and authority over this matter. For whereas he expounded the other parts of the parable, that section he left unexplained: what then may be the meaning of this, that the servants of the paterfamilias desire to gather up the tares before the harvest? Since [Christ] indicates this not otherwise than parabolically (*cum non facit aliter quam parabola indicat*), he undoubtedly leaves to be judged by the heads of his Church, which tares they must leave untouched until the end of days.<sup>40</sup>

The *meditatio* exercises a different kind of license, associating the field not with the world, as designated by Christ, but with the soul. In effect, Nadal reads figuratively the signified that Christ has supplied, interpreting *mundus* as a metaphor for the *anima in mundo*. He follows Christ's lead in creating a parable out of the matter at hand, and thereby tests our powers to discern, or rather, to meditate the embedded *doctrinam spiritualem*. The matter thus re-presented figuratively is the substance of the parable as unfolded by Christ: Nadal mixes the metaphors of the wheat and the tares in order to show that the field sown is the human soul, in which good and evil grow together. The votary is enjoined to acknowledge this sad state of affairs, as a prelude to disentangling his tangled soul. Just as Christ allows certain evils to persist until the end of the world, lest the elect do damage in trying to foreclose them, so he allows temptation, sinfulness, and corruption to arise within us in order that we may be moved to acknowledge our faults and, as a consequence, to improve ourselves: 'Likewise, Lord, do you deal with us. The concupiscence bequeathed by original sin rages

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 61–62: 'Denique nihil in haereticos designatur, quod ex doctrina & verbo Christi non accipiat auctoritatem. Cuius rei iudicium atque arbitrium plane videtur reliquisse Ecclesiae suae sponsae Christus. Nam cum reliquas partes parabola exponat; illud tamen, quod erat in parabola, non declarat: quid sit, quod servi Patrisfamilias volunt ante messem zizania colligere. Quod cum non facit aliter quam parabola indicat, absque dubitatione relinquit iudicandum Praepositis Ecclesiae suae, quae sint relinquenda zizania ad consummationem saeculorum'. On the parable as an hermeneutic instrument and its essential components – narrative form, metaphorical process, and modelling function – see Ricoeur P., "Biblische Hermeneutik", in Harnisch (ed.), *Die neutestamentliche Gleichnisforschung* 248–339.

within us, as do other sins and the corruptions arising from them: the devil inflicts temptations and perturbations – the flesh, the world, what evil does he not stir up within us? But these things he does out of spite, whereas you permit them out of goodness and providence. [...] be with us, [great Jesus], and by your infinite benignity renew in us the longed-for fruit of temptation'.<sup>41</sup> What Nadal seems to demonstrate is that parabolic hermeneutics are potentially unbounded: having been elucidated, the parable's meaning may serve as the source out of which another parable is fashioned, and thence another, and another. In this respect, he is imitating Christ, who in Matthew 13 generates a plethora of parables that flow out of each other in a continuous sequence that comments internally upon itself. In this sequence, the parables serve to comment upon the meaning of the parables that precede them: the parable of the tares re-reads by re-envisioning the parable of the sower, and so forth, the exposition of the latter providing a further gloss on the exposition of the former. For Nadal, it would seem, the process of parable formation, seen in these terms, is the meditative process *par excellence*.

*Imago* 48 describes the meeting of Christ and the dropsical man at the entrance of the chief Pharisee's house, where the parables of the ass, the ox, and the pit; of the guests at table; and of the great supper will soon be recounted [Fig. 4]. Here and in *imago* 49, Nadal considers the relation between *facta* and *verba*: he shows how the exemplary actions of Christ constitute a mode of parabolic speech, and also, how parables operate in the register of spiritual speech [Fig. 5]. Centred in the foreground are Jesus and the dropsical man, who, Nadal tells us, came in hope of being healed but feared to entreat Christ, because of the Pharisaical prohibitions enforced during the Sabbath. Jesus formulates the parable of the ass and ox that fall into a pit and are drawn out on the Sabbath in order to justify the lawfulness of the healing miracle he has just performed. Dividing the image into two halves, the grand house where Christ goes to dine with the Pharisees demarcates the place of this miracle (A). He stops before entering (B), asks

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<sup>41</sup> Nadal, *Adnotationes et meditationes* 62: 'Similiter Domine in nobis agnoscimus a te fieri. Saevit in nos relictā ex originali peccato concupiscentia; saeviunt alia peccata, & corruptiones ex his provenientes: infert tentator Daemon tentationes ac perturbationes; carnem, mundum, quid mali in nos non armat? Sed haec ille facit sua malitia; tu permittis tua bonitate & providentia. [...] tu nobis adsis, nobis fructum tentationis reponas optatum tua benignitate infinita'.

the Pharisees if it is permitted to heal on the Sabbath (Ba), and then cures by touching the dropsical man, adducing the parable of the ass, ox, and pit (Bb). The dropsical man stands before Christ (C), whom the Pharisees observe (D), and yet they keep silent (Da). In the background at left, the ass is pulled out of the pit (E), while the parable of the dinner guest who chooses the exalted place at table, only to be displaced by the guest who has chosen the humblest place, unfolds in the middle-ground at right (F).

The annotations give thought to the parabolic form and function of the actions Christ stages in concert with the parables he preaches. He heals the dropsical man in plain sight of the factious Pharisees to exemplify, by means of an enacted parable, the truth he also figures verbally through the parable of the ass, ox, and pit. Both the parabolic *factum* and its verbal complement operate figuratively: together they demonstrate that the redemptive vocation of Christ, here attested bodily by his *amor proximi*, trumps the factitious *amor rituum* of the overly fastidious Pharisees: 'But [Jesus] made a full and fitting rejoinder ('fit autem eius plena & apposita responsio'), when he took hold of the dropsical man and cured him, in spite of their doubts and objections. And thereupon, since they were keeping silent, he responded a second time: "Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fall into a pit, and will not immediately draw him out, on the Sabbath day?"<sup>42</sup> In a great paradox, Christ converses with their silence, first in deed then in word, so that reticent and recalcitrant, they are now truly silenced, all their scruples having been reprov'd. Nadal explains that Christ has the power to hear internal, as well as external, speech and to respond accordingly, both externally and internally, which is to say, visibly and audibly, but also spiritually. His parables, whether acted out or spoken, draw us into spiritual colloquy, with this implied difference: the charge of injustice, levelled by means of the story (the Pharisees esteem the Law more than mercy, their possessions more than the Law), resounds even more clearly in the counter-example of the dropsical man, whose figurative significance, offered as a kind of exordium to the subsequent parables, appears with exceeding transparency. Nadal makes this point in annotation Bb: 'Here he responds not once, but twice, to the silent

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 539: 'Fit autem eius plena & apposita responsio, ubi apprehensum sanat hydropicum, sive dubitarent, sive damnarent. Cum autem ibi tacerent, rursus respondit: Cuius vestrum asinus aut bos in puteum cadet, & non continuo extrahet illum die Sabbati?'



[Pharisees], convicting them of folly, with such efficacy that they cannot answer back. Having been healed, the dropsical man is easily seen to signify one who rejects the thirst after wealth, and furthermore, divests himself of the tumour of riches, gives his possessions to the poor, and follows Christ, his thirst and burden alleviated, far more than his dropsy'.<sup>43</sup> For Nadal, then, the argument of the parabolic miracle sets the theme – Pharisaical resistance to the New Law of Christ – that the spoken parables elaborate in increasingly coded, if commensurately visual, language. Viewed in this light, the relation between enactment and enunciation curiously resembles that between antitype and type, in which Christ bodies forth truths formerly prophesied or adumbrated in figures. Here, however, the elements being compared are different in degree, not in kind, for both enactment and enunciation operate figuratively, differing in this respect from the antitype.

Moreover, Christ reverses the historical progression from type to antitype, converting it into a process of hermeneutical retrogression, in which parables beget parables, figures further figures, that represent more exhaustively, but also more reconditely, the doctrine he promulgates. For example, the parable of the dinner guest, as Nadal argues in annotation F, encodes evangelical praise for the virtue of humility: couched as yet another indictment of the Jews ('coargutio Iudaeorum'), Christ's confutation of their arrogant striving for precedence serves finally to celebrate the virtue they spurn – *humilitas* – as the sole basis of Christian perfection.<sup>44</sup> This parable thus issues from and complements the prior parable of the ass, ox, and pit, refiguring its argument against the legalism of the Pharisees into an admonition against pride of place, and by implication, against prideful scrupulosity. The parable of the dinner guest also amplifies the message of the enacted parable, further exposing the folly of those who prefer status and its trappings over the Gospel. This parabolic chain passes through

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.: 'Hic bis respondet tacentibus: nec solum respondet, sed illos insipientiae coarguit, tanta efficacia, ut respondere non possent. Sanatus vero hydropicus facile intelligitur significare eum, qui divitiarum siti reiecta, divitiarum etiam tumorem deponit; dat pauperibus, quae possidet, & Christum sequitur, siti & onere plusquam intercute levatus'.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.: 'quae est parabola Christi ad confutandam eorum arrogantiam, qui primas in rebus omnibus ambiunt: ij enim nihil aliud quam ad ultimas ex ambitu se deijciunt: itaque via est certa ad perfectionem vitae Christianae & divinae contemplationis humilitas'. The reference to *coargutio Iudaeorum* appears in annotation E.

several layers of figuration, whose mutual relation, anchored in the figurative significance of the encounter between Christ and the dropsical man, remains discernible even while decreasing in transparency. The sequence of parables produces a cumulative effect like that engineered by Christ himself in Matthew 13:13–15: here he justifies his method of compounding parables by citing the densely figured language of Isaiah 6:9–10, which he construes as a warrant for figurative density: ‘This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which says: “You shall indeed hear but never understand, and you shall indeed see but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn for me to heal them”’.<sup>45</sup> If Christ fulfills this prophecy, he does so by layering parable onto parable: as the figurative burden gradually increases, so the distinction between Pharisaical blindness and Christian discernment becomes increasingly apparent. The latter consists in the ability to discern the key analogies upon which the parabolic similitudes are based.

The *meditatio*, focussing on these similitudes, urges the votary to discover possible analogies between the parables’ protagonists and himself. New correlatives are offered that stage a series of scenarios, inviting the reader-viewer serially to convert himself first into one, then another, of the *imago*’s leading characters. To begin, he must visualize himself as the chief of the Pharisees: ‘Assuredly, Christ Jesus, you entered the house of a certain chief Pharisee, but who this was I do not know, and yet suppose that he was first amongst them, namely, conspicuous with their faults, a hypocrite, blind, arrogant, superstitious, malicious, an opponent of your truth’.<sup>46</sup> The imaginative process

<sup>45</sup> “Evangelium Missae. Matth. XIII”, in Nadal, *Adnotationes et meditationes* 67: ‘Ideo in parabolis loquor eis: quia videntes non vident, & audientes non audiunt, neque intelligunt. Et adimpletur in eis prophetia Isaiae dicentis: Auditui audietis, & non intelligetis: & videntes videbitis, & non videbitis. Incrassatum est enim cor populi huius, & auribus graviter audierunt, & oculos suos clausuerunt: nequando videant oculis, & auribus audiant, & corde intelligant, & convertantur, & sanem eos’. The verb *convertantur* indicates that this passage refers to the failure to be converted.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 547: ‘Certum est mihi, Christe Iesu, te domum cuiusdam Principis Pharisaeorum intrasse; quis autem hic fuerit, ignoro; nisi quod primarius erat, ut puto, inter Pharisaeos, vitij scilicet Pharisaeorum insignis, hypocrita, caecus, arrogans, superstitiosus, malitiosus, veritatis tuae oppugnator’.

of conversion now commences: a sinful Pharisee he may be, but one who by the grace of Christ esteems the new doctrine as potentially good, desires to believe in Christ, and through him to be liberated from the death of sin ('sed illud gratia tua habeo, quod tuam doctrinam probo'). He is, as Nadal implies, a sort of Nicodemus, who secretly longs to be converted, a proto-penitent in the mould of Romans 7:15, 'For I do not that good which I will; but the evil which I hate, that I do'. Having glimpsed his sinful imperfection, and thus having been humbled, he is now free to envisage himself as the dropsical man, whose soul – foolish, negligent, and self-loving – has drunk excessively from the vanities and consolations of the world ('ebibit e consolationibus Spiritus sua socordia & abusu, propinat philautia'). Fearing the judgment of the Pharisees, he fails like the dropsical man to beseech Christ, not daring to pray for salvation; but realizing this, he sets about the task of reforming his method of prayer, and thereby, of petitioning Christ: 'For guided by my imperfections, I have devoted myself in prayer to savouring the festal banquet of consolations; almost never do I entreat you, even though this is the substance and fulfilment of prayer. Behold, Lord, I petition you [now], nor do I wish [any longer] to listen to the Pharisees in my soul'.<sup>47</sup> But the votary inhabits still the dropsical persona, for his entreaty, operating solely in the register of desire and intention, remains unspoken ('etiam si non explicem apud te, id est, vehementer desidero; quae est petitio apud te manifesta, ut hydropici fuit'). Calling upon Christ yet again, he therefore pleads for assistance in reforming totally his flawed manner of meditative prayer, which neglects to give voice to neediness and insufficiency: 'For I am altogether given over to the feast and pleasure of meditation; that [alone] pleases me, nor do I implore you or trouble myself to expose the sins fit to be cured: just as if prayer consisted alone in meditation of mind ('in meditatione mentis'), and speculation over sublime matters ('ac rerum sublimium speculatione'), and not rather in petition, supplication, and the action of thanks ('in petitione, obsecratione, & gratiarum actione')'.<sup>48</sup> By stages, the votary is analogized meditatively

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.: 'Ego enim meas imperfectiones secutus insisto festum consolationum agere in oratione, & fere nihil a te peto; quae tamen est substantia & finis orationis. En peto, Domine, nec volo audire meae animae Pharisaeos'.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.: 'Totus enim sum in festo & laetitia meditationis; illa me oblecto, nec curo tibi mea peccata offerre curanda, non obsecro te; quasi oratio sola illa esset, quae versatur in meditatione mentis, ac rerum sublimium speculatione, & non potius in petitione, obsecratione, & gratiarum actione'.

to an hypocritical Pharisee, to a Pharisaical penitent, to a dropsical man who fears to address Christ, and finally, to a dropsical supplicant, sinful and needy, who begs Christ to transform him. This transformation plays out when the *meditans* comes fully to acknowledge himself as the referent whom the enacted parable bodies forth figuratively.

*Imago* 49 illustrates the parable of the great supper as a figured retelling of the encounter between Christ and the dropsical man [Fig. 5].<sup>49</sup> The portico, its colonnade now Ionic rather than Tuscan, though still identified as the chief Pharisee's house (annotation A), serves as the meeting place of the householder and his servant, the parable's main protagonists. They stand in the places formerly inhabited by the *hydropicus* and Christ, whose attitudes they adopt – the householder, staff in hand, posed before a column; the servant looking at his master, pointing, and moving forward with right knee bent. This substitution of householder for dropsical man, servant for Christ, calls attention to the parabolic process that substitutes one thing for another, endowing this change of elements with analogical significance.<sup>50</sup> In Nadal's reading of the parable, as outlined in the annotations, the servant stands for Christ, the master for God the Father, which is to say that Christ serves the will of the Father, first inviting the Jews to banquet with him, and then, when they refuse, the needful gentiles, any and all of whom are called to attend.<sup>51</sup> These comparisons open out to further analogies: as the servant is to Christ, so the humility of Christ is expressed in his willingness to serve, to succour a sick man who fears to ask for

<sup>49</sup> On the exegetical tradition associated with the parable of the great supper in Luke 14:16–24, see Wailes, *Allegories of Jesus' Parables* 161–166. On the imagery of conversion in Luke 14, see Crossan J.D., "Gleichnisse der Verkehrung", in Harnisch (ed.), *Die neutestamentliche Gleichnisforschung* 127–158, esp. 148–149.

<sup>50</sup> Conversely, the analogical structure of the paired images activates the metaphorical process of interpretation, which equates the householder to the dropsical man, the servant to Christ, and the acts of serving and healing. In the same way, visual correspondences call attention to the metaphorical relation between scenes A and B of *imago* 38. In his study of Jacopo Bassano's *Parable of the Sower* of ca. 1561, Paolo Berdini dubs this process a 'redescription of the ordinary', observing that in the Gospels it operates without recourse to a *tertium comparationis*. Instead, the recipient of the parable is himself expected to reconcile the semantic fields of the narrative and of the reality it conveys metaphorically; see Berdini P., *The Religious Art of Jacopo Bassano: Painting as Visual Exegesis* (Cambridge – New York – Melbourne: 1997) 60–80, esp. 70. Throughout the *Adnotationes et meditationes*, whenever parables are illustrated, *similitudo* functions in lieu of the missing *tertium comparationis* as a guide to interpretation. On comparison as the basis of parabolic interpretation in both the Old and New Testaments, see Westermann, *Vergleiche und Gleichnisse* 105–135.

<sup>51</sup> Nadal, *Adnotationes et meditationes* 501, esp. annotations B, F, and G.

help, and to make of him a parabolic example (this latter action signified by his gesture of pointing). Conversely, the *hydropicus*, refigured as the master who commands his servant, signifies the imperative of healing humankind, made sickly by sin, that motivates the Father's act of sending his Son to gather up new guests. The corollary analogy between the banqueting tables in *imagines* 48 and 49, the former describing the parable of the guests at table, the latter that of the festal banquet, portends that at the divine table, humility shall secure the highest place.<sup>52</sup> The captions parsing *imago* 49 enumerate the constituents of the parable: the house of the chief Pharisee at Capharnaum (A); the man who sponsors the great supper, sending his servant to invite selected guests (B); the first guest, who declines in order to tend his newly purchased estate (C); the second, who declines in order to inspect his five-head of oxen (D); the third, who declines because he is newly wed (E); the impoverished multitude – blind, halt, and lame – that is invited to replace these guests (F); the people compelled to come from the highways and hedges (G); and the feast itself, which bestows grace in this life, glory in the life to come (H).

The annotations declare that the parables at Capharnaum, though originally addressed to sundry auditors – the parable of the guests at table to everyone invited by the chief Pharisee, that of the banquet and the resurrection of the just to the chief Pharisee, and that of the great supper to one of guests reclining at table – were in fact delivered as a whole for the benefit of the disciples ('omnes vero dictas voluit Discipulis') [Fig. 7]. Nadal thus instructs us to consider these parables as a set and to discern their mutual relation. He then expounds the parable of the great supper, identifying its chief referents: the pater-familias is God, who furnishes the Church with spiritual victuals; the servant is Christ, who calls many more under the New Testament than did God under the Old. The guests who decline are like people who hear the call of God and yet neglect it, only taking notice of mundane affairs. The impoverished multitude that responds to the summons is made up of those who acknowledge their spiritual destitution, while the guests compelled to come from outside the city are the Gentiles.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.: 'Ii scilicet vocationem Dei sentiunt & sequuntur, qui paupertatem suam agnoscunt, se debiles, caecos, se claudos esse, se bonis spiritualibus destitutos & egenos esse vident ac profitentur'.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.: 'Homo, qui paraverat coenam magnam, Deus est. [...] Misit Christum Pater aeternus, qui formam servi accepit, & servus dicitur: is vocat multo plures,

This forthright exposition, taken from the *Glossa ordinaria*, prepares the way for the more elaborate, recondite, and individuated readings developed in the *meditatio* [Figs. 7–8]. Here the parable is read as a call for conversion, the chief instrument of which is prayer and meditation on the parable's meaning:

We know, Lord God, that in your Church you make ready for us a table of graces and benefits; we know that in heaven you have laid a table of glory and celestial favours; we think, read, and speak continually: and yet do so in so arid, futile, and dry a fashion, that those things seem to have been written and spoken for others, not for us. And we put forward more excuses than the men whom Christ calls [in this parable]. For when we read those things, when we see ourselves firmly called to both your tables [viz., in heaven and in the Church], that is, to restoration and fortification of the spirit and to hope of life eternal, we are at first stupefied, and as if without sense, we understand nothing deeply, perceive nothing with the heart.<sup>54</sup>

Nadal demonstrates in the *meditatio* how sense and understanding result when the parable's analogies, having been properly meditated, are applied inventively and specifically to oneself and one's circumstances. (It is worth recalling here that the person he addresses is the Jesuit scholastic, enrolled at one of the order's colleges.) Citing Psalm 140:4, 'Incline not my heart to evil words: to make excuses in sins', he poses the question whether the *excusatores* whom Christ reproves parabolically are not we ourselves who persist in making excuses for our sins and disobedience ('non similiter atque illi excusatores excusamus nostras excusationes in inobedientiis & peccatis nostris').<sup>55</sup> By placing temporal goods and honours above Christ, we become like the guest who adduced a newly bought villa to justify his refusal to attend. By privileging our five senses and the pleasures they

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quam antea vocaverat Deus. [...] Via & sepes, unde pauperes, & debiles, & caecos, & claudos, & quoslibet, Gentiles scilicet, compellit (quod in civitate non fecerat) ad coenam intrare'.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.: 'Scimus, Domine Deus, te nobis coenam in Ecclesia tua gratiarum & donorum tuorum paratum habere. Scimus te coenam gloriae & caelestium donorum reposuisse in caelo; cogitamus, legimus, loquimur identidem: verum adeo aride id facimus, adeo infructuose & ieiune, ut aliis scripta & dicta illa esse videantur, non nobis: & plures adducimus excusationes, quam illi homines, quos vocat Christus. Ubi enim illa legimus, ubi videmus nos ad coenam tuam utramque, id est, ad refectionem & robur animae, & spem vitae sempiternae tam serio, tam vehementer vocari, obstupemus primum, & quasi excordes nihil profundius intelligimus, nihil corde percipimus'.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

offer, over the untried spiritual pleasures offered by God, we become like the guest who adduced a five-head of oxen. And by fretting over the vow of chastity to forestall entry into the religious life, we become like the guest who adduced his new bride. All such vain excuses give evidence of our resistance to the spiritual impulses with which God daily inspires us ('si spectemus ad quotidianos Dei instinctus, miram videamus & vanam excusationem').<sup>56</sup> Lest we continue to divagate and temporize, the remedy of meditative prayer must be applied: 'What then is to be done: I know on the contrary, good and holy Jesus, that by diligence of mind, you wish us in your Spirit to expel all excuses against better doing: which we shall achieve, only if we are otherwise converted to virtue and perfection by the Spirit of God and the effort of our mind, having [thus far] abused the spirit of our flesh in sins and imperfections. To this end, let us employ, as far as we are able, the defences furnished by prayer and meditation ('ex meditatione & oratione'), conjoined to spiritual sense and active experience'.<sup>57</sup>

If we apply ourselves in this way, parabolic exegesis will become the meditative instrument that allows us to transform the parable's metaphors and by this means to represent our forthcoming conversion. The villa will be seen in this new light to signify the virtue of poverty we must embrace in answer to the divine summons. The five-head of oxen will symbolize the exterior and interior senses, as well as the cognitive faculties of memory, intellect, and will, to be exercised in obedience to our religious superiors. The bride will stand for chastity of body and mind, the chaste pleasures of which become manifest when, following Romans 12:2, we fully embrace the religious life: 'And be not conformed to this world; but be reformed in the newness of your mind'.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 501–502.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 502: 'Quid igitur: intelligo, bone & sancte Iesu, e contrario te velle a nobis in Spiritu tuo & nostrae mentis industria esse illas & plane omnes excusationis melius agendi repellendas: quod facimus, si quidem, qui spiritu carnis nostrae abusi sumus ad peccata & imperfectiones, contra, spiritu Dei, & mentis nostrae industria, ad virtutem & perfectionem convertamur. Habeamus vero parata ad id praesidia ex meditatione & oratione, coniuncto quoad poterimus spirituali sensu & experientia actionum'.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.: 'Emptam habeamus villam speciosam, amplam, divinitus fructuosam paupertatem [...]. Bovum iuga quinque coempta exerceamus; sensus scilicet nostros tum externos, tum internos, & intellectuales potentias, memoriam, intellectum, voluntatem, & inferiorem ex his portionem animae, ac superiorem. [...] Uxoris loco asciscamus sanctam & impollutam mentis & corporis castitatem, omnemque voluptatem reiiciamus [...]'.

Nadal is asking us to imagine how the meaning of the parable's images might be inverted by a guest who adduces farm, oxen, and wife not as *excusationes*, but as attributes of the religious life and metaphors of its fundamental properties. To read the parable in this way is in a sense to distort it, but in another sense, this reading, fashioned meditatively, remains true to the parable's form and function: for it implicitly calls forth the image of a votary who, hearing the call of God, understands the parable, and who, taking possession of its elements, affirms that he has been converted.



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SIGHT AND INSIGHT:  
PAUL AS A MODEL OF CONVERSION  
IN RHETORICIANS' DRAMA

Bart Ramakers

The conversion of the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–19) was repeatedly dramatised in the sixteenth century. During the reformation, the metamorphosis of Saul, the fanatical persecutor of Christians, into Paul, the strong champion of Christ, became a model for the transformation that every Christian should undergo: from supporting the old faith to preaching the new.<sup>1</sup> In addition, his conversion was quite spectacular and literally spoke to the imagination. Paul was, after all, blinded by the light that had suddenly surrounded him and his companions on the road to Damascus.

This article focuses on a dramatisation of this conversion story, called *The Conversion of Paul (De Bekeeringe Pauli)*. The play was written by an anonymous rhetorician from Brabant, possibly originating from Vilvoorde, and is dated at roughly the middle of the sixteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The term 'rhetoricians' is meant to indicate poets and playwrights who dominated the vernacular literary practice in the Netherlands from the fifteenth to the early seventeenth century. They were organised in chambers of rhetoric, literary societies, of which every

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<sup>1</sup> Paul himself refers to the Damascus experience sporadically in his epistles. See Fredriksen P., "Paul and Augustine: Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions, and the Retrospective Self", *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986) 3–34, esp. 4, note 3. The interpretation of the change he underwent as a convert heavily depends on the description in Acts and on Augustine's modeling of his own conversion after that of Paul's, or *vice versa* (Fredriksen, "Paul and Augustine" 5, 15–17, 23–24, 26–27). For Luther's interpretation, see Fredriksen, "Paul and Augustine" 16, note 39. In what follows, the name Paul will be used, even though his name before his conversion was Saul and this change of name marks his inner transformation. On his two names, see Rapske B., *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody, The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting* 3 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: 1994) 85–86.

<sup>2</sup> Hummelen W.M.H., *Repertorium van het rederijkersdrama, 1500–ca. 1620* (Assen: 1968). no. 1K2; edition: Steenbergen G.J. (ed.), *De Bekeeringe Pauli* (Zwolle: 1959). There is another rhetoricians' play on this theme: *De bekeeringe van Sinte Paulus*, dated 1618 (Hummelen, *Repertorium* no. 1T2).

city in Brabant, Flanders, Zeeland and Holland had one or more.<sup>3</sup> The aim of this article is to show how Paul functions as a model of conversion in this play. The way in which his conversion is given shape, both verbally and visually, is examined. This requires a kind of reading in which the play is, as it were, staged mentally and the dialogue and stage directions are synthesised into a concrete course of action through knowledge of the dramaturgy and the performance practice of rhetoricians' drama.<sup>4</sup>

This reconstruction will show the nature of the conversion that the playwright has Paul undergo and the model that he attempted to offer to the audience. The first point this article makes, is that his conversion comes down to an inner change resulting from a process of sight and insight, first physically, then spiritually. The assumption is that one is converted only when one has seen. The Christian context of the story is about the seeing of God, in his form as the Father, the Son (Christ) or as the Holy Trinity (with the Holy Ghost). The climax of the play comes down to divine vision (*visio Dei*), the ultimate goal of late medieval mystical ascension.

The second point this article makes, is that this play did not have the intention of converting an audience to the Protestant faith, or to strengthen such a belief. Rather, it seeks to bring its audience to an expression of the individual believer's personal relationship with God, which was experienced inwardly, in the heart, and which transcended contemporary religious disputes. In this way it runs counter to a purely textual approach by which rhetoricians' plays are examined primarily in the search for controversial stances *in theologicis*.<sup>5</sup> According to that

<sup>3</sup> Ramakers B. (ed.), *Conformisten en rebellen. Rederijerscultuur in de Nederlanden (1400–1650)* (Amsterdam: 2003); Bruaene A.-L. Van, *Om beters wille. Rederijerskamers en de stedelijke cultuur in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden (1400–1650)* (Amsterdam: 2008); Dixhoorn A. van, *Lustige geesten: Rederijers in de Noordelijke Nederlanden (1480–1650)* (Amsterdam: 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Grabes H., "Staging Plays in the Theatre of the Mind", in Scolnicov H. – Holland P. (eds.), *Reading Plays. Interpretation and Reception* (New York etc.: 1991) 94–109, esp. 95.

<sup>5</sup> This approach has been tried and tested by the famous collection of plays that were staged during the rhetoricians contest held in Ghent in 1539. For a survey of research, see Ramakers B., "In utramque partem vel in plures. Meinungs- und Deutungsdivergenzen im Genter Bühnenwettkampf von 1539", in Stollberg-Rilinger B. – Weller Th. (eds.), *Wertekonflikte – Deutungskonflikte. Internationales Kolloquium des Sonderforschungsbereichs 496 an der Westfälische Wilhelmsuniversität Münster, 19.–20. Mai 2005, Symbolische Kommunikation und gesellschaftliche Wertesysteme*,

approach, *The Conversion of Paul* would be considered a Protestant play. This would not only fail to do justice to rhetoricians' drama by assuming that it revolves only around the spoken word, around dialogue that serves aims of propaganda, it would also fail to do justice to the religious experience of sixteenth-century laymen in the city, the authors and audiences of these plays, by reducing it to a categorical dogmatic or confessional position. Most religious rhetoricians' drama – and the play being discussed here is an example of this – does touch on contemporary religious controversy, but does not busy itself with it in any real way, neither explicitly nor implicitly.

### *Approach*

Because of the tropological (moral) dimensions with which rhetoricians imbue Biblical stories (and religious matters in general), understanding was for them as much a spiritual as an intellectual activity (perhaps more of a spiritual one), in which, along with the mind, an important role was attributed to the heart, that part of the soul where human perception was experienced emotionally.

The spiritual experience of their plays revolved around an activity by which the audience understood the verbal and visual acts primarily as a type of sight and insight. This 'sight' should be taken literally with regard to the communicative situation of theatre, on both the level of the play as that of the audience. Characters and audience were involved in a process of observation and interpretation of the action, which strongly appealed to both external and internal senses. They were stimulated to do so implicitly and explicitly over the course of the play. Sensory vision was thus supplemented by spiritual vision. The latter involved a kind of understanding that superseded reasoning (*supra rationem*), a kind of meditation (*meditatio*) instead of cogitation (*cogitatio*). Here the difference between 'internal' and 'external',

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*Schriftenreihe des Sonderforschungsbereichs 496 16* (Münster: 2007) 197–226. The norm for this approach has been set by Drewes J.B., "Het interpreteren van godsdienstige spele van zinne", *Jaarboek Koninklijke Soevereine Hoofdkamer "De Fonteyne" te Gent* 29 (1978–1979) (Gent: 1994) 5–124. For an English language study following his approach, see Waite G.K., *Reformers on Stage. Popular Drama and Religious Propaganda in the Low Countries of Charles V, 1515–1556* (Toronto – Buffalo – London: 2000).

‘inner’ and ‘outer’ played an important role. It concerned ‘a powerful tool of self-analysis’ rooted in Pauline and Augustinian discourse on the relationship between believer and God.<sup>6</sup> This system of knowledge originated rationally in university scholasticism and spiritually in the devotional practices of monastic life. In the Low Countries of the late-medieval and sixteenth-century period, it spread to urban laypeople through theatre and the visual arts.<sup>7</sup>

The approach to the plays from this essentially medieval perspective has consequences for the interpretation of the plays in light of the religious controversy of the sixteenth century. There is a tradition of research into rhetoricians’ plays that examines them at the level of the text (in other words, the dialogue) for indications of orthodox (Catholic) or heterodox (Protestant) views. This approach mostly comes down to the comparison of individual words, phrases or passages that imply a preference for the one or the other religious alignment. It mostly leaves out, however, the interaction between word and image, so important to the experience of theatre in general and sixteenth-century theatre in particular. An analysis that does take this interaction and experience into account shows that the rhetoricians did not necessarily attempt to influence the audience in their choice of the one or the other religious or ecclesiastical position, but rather their direct relationship with God.<sup>8</sup> It concerned theatre that wished to address them, touch them even, where they thought this relationship was primarily experienced: in the heart.

<sup>6</sup> Stock B., “The Self and Literary Experience in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages”, *New Literary History* 25, 4 (1994) 839–852, esp. 842; Riley P., *Character and Conversion in Autobiography. Augustine, Montaigne, Descartes, Rousseau, and Sartre* (Charlottesville – London: 2004) 39; Biernoff S., *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (Houndmills, Basingstoke – New York: 2002) 122–123, 136–137. For a study on the conversion of Paul as it is represented in the visual arts in the Netherlands during the sixteenth century, see T. Richardson, “The Turn of the Soul: Pieter Bruegel’s *Conversion of St. Paul*”, in Ribouillault D. – Weemans M. (eds.), *Paysage sacré et exégèse visuelle / Sacred Landscape and Visual Exegesis* (Florence: forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> Moser N., *De strijd voor rhetorica. Poëtica en positie van rederijders in Vlaanderen, Brabant, Zeeland en Holland tussen 1450 en 1620* (Amsterdam: 2001) 152–163; Falkenburg R.L., “Doorzien als esthetische ervaring bij Pieter Brueghel I en het vroeg-zestiende-eeuwse landschap”, in Devisscher H. (ed.), *De uitvinding van het landschap, van Patinir tot Rubens, 1520–1650* (Antwerpen: 2004) 53–65, esp. 63–65; Ramakers B., “In utramque partem vel in plures” 217–221.

<sup>8</sup> Ramakers, “Dutch Allegorical Theatre. Tradition and Conceptual Approach”, in Happé P. – Strietman E. (eds.), *Urban Theatre in the Low Countries 1400–1625* (Turnhout: 2006) 127–147, esp. 224–226.

The plays appeal to a kind of spirituality that developed in the sixteenth century, ran through the various confessional factions starting to establish themselves, and had roots pre-dating the Reformation. Within it, representations in word and image of subjects of salvation history occupied an important place. Traditionally, this concerned devotional subjects, especially the suffering of Christ. The sixteenth century saw the introduction of several themes from the Old and New Testament, informed and inspired by knowledge of the Bible (known either through the Vulgate or some vernacular translation).

### *Conversion and Theatre*

What is a conversion? In antiquity and medieval times, the concept of *conversio* did not just mean crossing over into Christianity, but also the choice of a way of living favoured by God, such as monkhood.<sup>9</sup> Speaking in terms of soteriology, a conversion revolves around 'the soul's turn to repentance'.<sup>10</sup> Theologically more precise and, more importantly, more relevant to the context of the play in question, it is 'the point at which man enters into a new relationship with Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit [...] and then subsequently embarks on a pilgrimage in grace'.<sup>11</sup> The metaphor of 'a change from darkness to light' will also prove relevant.<sup>12</sup> In the sixteenth century, choosing one of the emerging Protestant denominations was also seen as conversion.<sup>13</sup>

The sociology of religion understands conversion as a choice of faith entailing an existential break and bringing change to the personality

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<sup>9</sup> Lotz-Heumann U. – Missfelder J.-F. – Pohlig M., "Konversion und Konfession in der Frühen Neuzeit: Systematische Fragestellungen", in Lotz-Heumann U. – Missfelder J.-F. – Pohlig M. (eds.), *Konversion und Konfession in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Heidelberg: 2007) 11–32, esp. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Murray M., *The Poetics of Conversion in Early Modern English Literature. Verse and Change from Donne to Dryden* (Cambridge: 2009) 11.

<sup>11</sup> Questier M., *Conversion, Politics, and Religion in England, 1580–1625* (Cambridge: 1996) 58.

<sup>12</sup> Pol F. van der, "Conversion and Civil Society. Ysbrandus Trabius's Sermon *Het cleyne mostertzaet* (1590)", in Bremmer J.N. – Bekkum W.J. van – Molendijk A.L. (eds.), *Paradigms, Poetics and Politics of Conversion, Groningen Studies in Cultural Change* 18 (Leuven etc.: 2006) 73–84, esp. 77.

<sup>13</sup> Lotz-Heumann – Missfelder – Pohlig, "Konversion und Konfession" 18.

structure of the converted, that is in their identity.<sup>14</sup> It entails a process that reaches its climax through phases of destabilisation, crisis and restoration of self. For this reason, conversion plays can be approached as means of identity formation. They show the audience how to relate to God or to their circumstances in a similar situation, and thus, as it were, to reconstitute themselves. (In this context it is important to remember that conversion stories – including Paul's – do not necessarily reflect real processes of consciousness, but are rather retrospective constructions along the lines of literary and rhetorical models.)<sup>15</sup> Typical, moreover, is a feeling of being overwhelmed, which in the Christian context usually comes down to a strong sense of guilt and a sudden breakthrough of grace.<sup>16</sup> Guilt, grace and repentance are terms that play an essential role in most conversion stories, especially Biblical ones, due to their soteriological nature. It is true, in fact, for all Christian conversions, regardless of whether they are between or within denominations, that they take place with regard to the spiritual salvation of the convert. Because of this, God himself, in the forms of the Father, the Son or the Holy Ghost, figures in conversion stories.

Especially where it touches on the role of God and His grace – the latter is, after all, granted by Him – the convert undergoes this transformation passively.<sup>17</sup> Paul is brought to conversion entirely unexpectedly and directly by God, appearing as Christ. In his case, it may be called a mystical conversion.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, a scent of hope appears to be a condition for conversion,<sup>19</sup> especially in the form of the divine virtue of that name – Hope – and her sister virtues Faith and Charity. In the play all three are alluded to, although not represented in the form of personifications. Another motif characterising the play is that of the journey. The conversion of Paul is a traveller's tale. It makes the

<sup>14</sup> Lotz-Heumann – Missfelder – Pohlig, "Konversion und Konfession" 21.

<sup>15</sup> Fredriksen, "Paul and Augustine" 33; Pollack D., "Überlegungen zum Begriff und Phänomen der Konversion aus religionssoziologischer Perspektive", in Lotz-Heumann U. – Missfelder J.-F. – Pohlig M., *Konversion und Konfession in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Heidelberg: 2007) 33–55, esp. 44.

<sup>16</sup> Pollack, "Überlegungen" 52.

<sup>17</sup> Pollack, "Überlegungen" 52.

<sup>18</sup> Oksanen A., *Religious Conversion. Meta-Analytical Study*, *Lund Studies in Psychology of Religion* 2 (Lund: 1994) 53.

<sup>19</sup> Wilcox H., "'Return unto me!' Literature and Conversion in Early Modern England", in Bremmer J.N. – Bekkum W.J. van – Molendijk A.L. (eds.), *Paradigms, Poetics and Politics of Conversion*, *Groningen Studies in Cultural Change* 18 (Leuven etc.: 2006) 91.



story very suitable to dramatisation in the form of a rhetoricians' play, since it follows the ground pattern of the pilgrimage of life.

### *Theatre and Rhetoric*

*The Conversion of Paul* belongs to the genre of the *spel van sinne* or *zinnespel*, the Dutch version of the morality play 'in which a *sin* (meaning 'lesson' or 'moral') is articulated and represented'.<sup>20</sup> To be specific, the play belongs to a sub-genre in which historical (mainly Biblical) characters appear alongside personifications, 'who perform a prologue to introduce the main action, and round it off with an epilogue in which they provide an explanation of it, in some cases allegorical'.<sup>21</sup> As such, *The Conversion of Paul* offers a variation of the model that rhetoricians have endlessly repeated in their allegorical plays, namely that of the representative of humanity – the Mankind-character – who liberates himself from a state of sin or ignorance and attains grace or insight.

The action in the *spel van sinne* normally follows a course whereby things are gradually turned inside out and the spiritual meaning of the presentation on stage is shown in an increasingly explicit way. The transition from the outer to the inner, from visible action to its interpretation, can be signalled dramaturgically by the prologues and epilogues mentioned previously, that ready the audience at the beginning and stimulate them at the end so that they contemplate the higher, spiritual level of what they were just shown. *The Conversion of Paul* is prefaced by a prologue, in which two unnamed citizens present the play to its contemporary audience.

The dramaturgy of the rhetoricians' theatre is aimed, through action and image, at bringing its viewers intellectual insight, but also at inciting an affective attitude towards that which has been shown. This attitude is one of admiration, awe or – where it concerns the play's protagonist – identification or compassion. *Enargeia* (vividness) thus leads to *energeia* (affect).<sup>22</sup> All in all, this type of theatre manifests a strong corporeality, or, put differently: the character's 'body is as

<sup>20</sup> Ramakers, "Dutch Allegorical Theatre" 129.

<sup>21</sup> Ramakers, "Dutch Allegorical Theatre" 137.

<sup>22</sup> Heinen U., "Emotionales Bild-Erleben in der Frühen Neuzeit", in Zymner R. – Engel M. (eds.), *Anthropologie der Literatur. Poetogene Strukturen und ästhetisch-soziale Handlungsfelder* (Paderborn: 2004) 356–382, esp. 367–373.

eloquent as his speech'.<sup>23</sup> It is characterised by a kind of theatricality that 'emphasizes the visionary over both the verbal and intellectual'.<sup>24</sup> The use of terms of rhetoric in this regard answers to the insights of the rhetoricians themselves, who strongly viewed their literary art, and their theatre in particular, as an equivalent to classical oratory.<sup>25</sup>

The use in theatre of the body in general, and of the process of embodiment particularly, rested on notions that can be traced through rhetoric to contemporary ideas on the workings of the human psyche. The long standing popularity of the theatre did not just rest on its reach in a quantitative sense, because it had, due to its aural and visual character, a considerable audience, certainly when performed outside in the public space. It also arose from its function in a qualitative sense, because through its triple eloquence of word, image and action, emanating from the living presence of the characters on stage, it achieved effects which other forms of (literary) communication barely managed to match.<sup>26</sup> In this respect, theatre, like painting, met the 'ability and even eagerness to learn from pictures and other visual representations' in general.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Pfister M., "Reading the Body: the Corporeality of Shakespeare's Text", in Scolnicov H. – Holland P. (eds.), *Reading Plays. Interpretation and Reception* (New York etc.: 1991) 110–122, esp. 115.

<sup>24</sup> Crawford Pickett H., "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion in Dekker and Massinger's The Virgin Martyr", *Studies in English Literature* 49, 2 (2009) 437–462, esp. 451.

<sup>25</sup> Ramakers B., "Tonen en betogen. De dramaturgie van de Rotterdamse spelen van 1561", in Duits H. – Strien T. van (eds.), *'De rhetorijcke in vele manieren'. Lezingen bij het afscheid van Marijke Spies als hoogleraar Oudere Nederlandse Letterkunde aan de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam*, special issue *Spiegel der Letteren* 43, 3 (2001) 176–204, esp. 178–186.

<sup>26</sup> There is evidence of this effectiveness from the cognitive sciences, the insights of which are starting to be incorporated more and more by theatre scholars in their own approaches. See in this regard Hart F.E., "Performance, Phenomenology, and the Cognitive Turn", in McConachie B. – Hart F.E. (eds.), *Performance and Cognition. Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn* (London – New York: 2006) 29–51; Mancing H., "See the Play, Read the Book", in McConachie B. – Hart F.E. (eds.), *Performance and Cognition. Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn* (London – New York: 2006) 189–206; Cook A., "Interplay: The Method and Potential of a Cognitive Scientific Approach to Theatre", *Theatre Journal* 59 (2007) 579–594. The relevant method seems to stimulate primarily a phenomenological approach to theatre (Hart, "Performance" 33–34). On such an approach, see States B.O., *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms. On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley etc.: 1985); Garner Jr. S.B., *Bodied Spaces. Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca – London: 1994) 24–28, 40–51.

<sup>27</sup> Spolsky E., *Word vs Image. Cognitive Hunger in Shakespeare's England* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: 2007) 8.

As noted earlier, these effects concerned identity formation, mainly in the religious and spiritual field, through perception (by the senses), followed by internalisation (through memory) and imitation of models of thought and action presented in the plays. To establish all this, a performative approach is required, an approach in which the performance of the play is the main object. The reason for choosing this approach is the fact that historical drama was received, first and foremost, as a performance, not as text to be read. This is even truer for the drama of the rhetoricians. When one aims to reconstruct how their plays were staged, and which effects were intended, one cannot ignore their performative nature.<sup>28</sup>

### *Light and Sight*

We focus on the moment of reversal. In the Biblical tradition this is described metaphorically as a movement from darkness to light. Thus Paul, according to Luke, the supposed author of Acts, describes the aim of his mission among the Gentiles by quoting words that Christ spoke to *him* in the moment of *his* conversion (Acts 26:18), which was also one from darkness to light. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul transposes this same metaphor of the visible reality of the story of creation – “‘Let there be light’; and there was light’ (Gen. 1:3)<sup>29</sup> – to a spiritual reality of the human heart: ‘For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness”, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ’ [Vulgate: *qui inluxit in cordibus nostris ad inlumenationem scientiae claritatis Dei in facie Christi Iesu*] (2 Cor. 4:6)<sup>30</sup> – the light in which Paul himself indeed saw Christ on the road to Damascus. This shows that his conversion, in line with the general pattern established earlier, is a

<sup>28</sup> Worthen W.B., “Drama, Performativity, and Performance”, *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 113 (1998) 1093–1107; Jahn M., “Narrative Voice and Agency in Drama: Aspects of a Narratology of Drama”, *New Literary History* 32 (2001) 659–679, esp. 660–661. On the performative approach in cultural studies generally, see Gertsman E., *Visualizing Medieval Performance. Perspectives, Histories, Contexts* (Aldershot – Burlington, VT: 2008).

<sup>29</sup> Bible quotations are taken from the *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (Revised Standard Version) (New York: 1973 [1962]).

<sup>30</sup> In several cases, the Vulgate is cited primarily where it concerns moments of light and sight. This happens because the Latin words for these and related terms are used in the late medieval discourse surrounding spiritual vision.

profoundly inward experience, with the heart as the scene of action.<sup>31</sup> There one meets, knows or sees Christ through the light – the spiritual light, of course, perceived by the inner eye, that sees more when the physical light, as in the case of Paul's sudden blindness, is removed from the physical eye.

Although Jesus blessed 'those who have not seen and yet believe' (Jn. 20:29) – His reaction to the doubting Thomas – He emphasises in many more places the importance of faith *after* having seen. He is, after all, God incarnate, who has entered into the world so that He may be seen. It is all the worse to see Him and then not believe – which He also emphasises on several occasions. And even though Paul stressed that 'we walk by faith, not by sight' (2 Cor. 5:7), blind faith is not required.<sup>32</sup> In *De Trinitate*, Augustine describes physical and spiritual sight as being in line with each other. It is his 'claim that, on the one hand, the accurate "seeing" of visible objects irreducibly involves the exercise of spiritual vision, while on the other hand, spiritual vision ultimately includes seeing with the eyes of the body'.<sup>33</sup> This view forms the key to interpreting the meeting with Christ, the vision of him, which is central here. In the rhetoricians' dramatisation of Paul's conversion, there is a kind of sensory vision, which audiences can at once *interpret* or – judging by the way in which it is dramatised – *experience* as spiritual vision, which in turn they can *share* due to the fact that it is made visible on stage.<sup>34</sup> They witness *along with* Paul Christ's appearance, which must be kept in the heart.

<sup>31</sup> Pol van der, "Conversion and civil society" 75.

<sup>32</sup> Miles M., "Vision: The Eye of the Body and the Eye of the Mind in Saint Augustine's *De trinitate* and *Confessions*", *The Journal of Religion* 63, 2 (1983) 125–142, esp. 131.

<sup>33</sup> Miles, "Vision" 39. On knowledge as spiritual seeing, see: Knuuttila S., *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: 2004) 144.

<sup>34</sup> On the importance of the image as medium and of the visible as key to the invisible, see Krüger K., "Authenticity and Fiction: On the Pictorial Construction of Inner Presence in Early Modern Italy", in Falkenburg R. – Melion W.S. – Richardson T.M. (eds.), *Image and Imagination of the Religious Self in Late Medieval And Early Modern Europe, Proteus: Studies in Early Modern Identity Formation* 1 (Turnhout: 2007) 37–69, esp. 42, 60.

*The Prologue*

The degree to which the imagination is activated immediately shows from the prologue of *The Conversion of Paul*, a scene in which two citizens (*Eerste* and *Tweede Borger*) egg each other on, as it were, to envision the Passion of Christ from the entry into Jerusalem. Conjugations of verbs such as 'show', 'speak', 'see', 'hear' and 'imagine', or synonyms of these, abound. We are dealing here with *enargeia* in the form of immaterial, verbal semblances of scenes that are not really present to the audience. That the playwright can trust the audience to conjure up these images has to do with the fact that they were already familiar as memory-images (*phantasmata*) through reading or sermons, and simply needed to be activated by the citizens' appeals.<sup>35</sup>

After the first citizen has confessed to the second his horror about the fate of those who, these days, 'testify' ('gewagen'; vs. 3) of Christ, the second citizen exhorts him to show the same kind of 'patience' ('patience') as Jesus did prior to his death: have Christ 'before the eyes' ('voor oogen'; vs. 6). That one has to suffer for one's faith is something that the prophets 'show clearly' ('claerlijck toogen'; vs. 8). Images are conjured of persecution and tribulation for those who called out His name and 'showed' the truth ('deden blijcken'; vs. 10). The first citizen urges the second on two separate occasions with the words 'think of' ('Peyst toch'; vss. 11, 57), to recall certain moments of the Passion from memory. The second citizen starts a similar call with the words 'Oh, think of' ('Och, denckt hoe'; vs. 21), followed by a quotation from Jn 15:20, which he interrupts by urging: 'do remember this' ('wilt dit onthouwen'; vs. 22) and underlines with the words: 'This he has said to us' ('Dit heeft hy ons gespelt'; vs. 23), followed by the conclusion: 'so we should trust in his word' ('Dus moeten wy vast in zyn woort betrouwen'; vs. 24).

About thirty lines onwards, the second citizen recalls how, in Jerusalem, Christ on the cross prayed with tears in his voice for this city, followed by the words in question (Lk. 19:41–42). This is followed by

<sup>35</sup> Webb R., *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Farnham – Burlington, VT: 2009) 107, 111; Melion W.S., "Introduction: Meditative Images and the Psychology of Soul", in Falkenburg R. – Melion W.S. – Richardson T.M. (eds.), *Image and Imagination of the Religious Self in Late Medieval And Early Modern Europe, Proteus: Studies in Early Modern Identity Formation 1* (Turnhout: 2007) 1–36, esp. 2.

another confirmation: 'On this he spoke clearly' ('Hier af hoorden wij claelijck van hem bescheet'; vs. 64). The second citizen exclaims how he 'remembers' the arrest at the Court of Gethsemane ('gedenckt'; vs. 69). Then the first citizen quotes Christ's words to his assailants: 'I am he' ('Ich bent'; Jn. 18:6, vs. 73) and how – entirely apocryphally – Christ's words made them collapse onto the earth, after which one word from him made them all rise again. At the end of the prologue, the first citizen reminds the second of Christ's words on the cross (Lk. 23:46), only to add, in excess, 'this we heard [him] say' ('Dit hoorden wij spreken'; vss. 91–92).

This kind of addition functions partially as a filling rhyme, but the effect is not diminished. All who sought his help were helped, as one could 'see' when looking at his life ('aenschouwen'; vs. 27). The two emphasise how Christ 'spoke' ('sprack'; vss. 29, 73) or 'called' ('riep'; vs. 91), talk about his 'words' ('woorden'; vs. 31) and bring the historical reality home by using 'saying' ('Seggende'; vs. 32), followed by a new quotation from the Bible. The imagination is also stimulated by rhetorical questions such as 'didn't one see him [...]?' ('Sachmen hem niet [...]?'; vss. 41–42) and 'did we not hear out master say?' ('Hoorden wij oock [niet] van onsen meester verclaren'; vs. 78), followed by a quotation from Christ. This literal quoting of Biblical characters also stimulates the imagination, primarily when there is an emphasis on the fact that these are quotes, and on who is being quoted. The rapture as a result of the activation of such memories leads to exclamations containing 'Oh' ('O'; vss. 1, 66, 85, 101, 103) and 'Ah' ('Och'; vss. 21, 69, 93, 105) and an ecstatic prayer that ends the prologue (vss. 85–107). It has the form of a stichomythia. Through the rapid alternation between speeches consisting of a single or even half a line, the dramatic situation is intensified.

Thus, the prologue of *The Conversion of Paul* seems to aim to induce a perceptive attitude in its audience, in which it becomes more receptive to the Biblical narrative with which it is presented in the actual play itself. It is not just meant to bring the audience into what is known in theatre studies as 'suspension of disbelief' – the experience, for the duration of the play, that one is witnessing something real and tangible that is happening in this place and at this time – but also to stimulate them not to take Paul's conversion at face value only, and rather to contemplate (or even better, to see) its many possible meanings.

*Paul's Conversion*

The motifs of light, blindness and sight are already present in the Biblical text in a subtle and meaningful way, which begs closer examination. The story seems simple: Paul was heading to Damascus, when 'suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him' [Vulgate: *subito circumfulsit eum lux de caelo*] (Acts 9:3). It was so strong that he closes his eyes in a reflex – as is shown later in Acts 9:8 – and falls to the ground (Acts 9:4). Whether he is walking or riding is left undecided by the Biblical text. Only Paul is struck blind. Of his travelling companions – in the play they are called 'servants' ('dienaeren') – it is said that they 'stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one' (Acts 9:7).

The implication of this message is that Paul *did* see something, namely that bright light (or more; we shall return to this) to which, as previously mentioned, he had closed his eyes. Apparently he was blinded by it, because when he 'arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; so they [had to] lead him by the hand and bring him into Damascus' (Acts 9:8). Paul does not only see the light and is blinded by it, he also hears 'a voice saying to him: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"' (Acts 9:4). 'And he [Paul] said: "Who are you, Lord?" And he [the Lord] said: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do"' (Acts 9:5–6). Paul does not enquire after the identity of the voice, but after that of the Lord, who thereupon reveals Himself as Jesus. By persecuting Christ's followers, he persecutes Christ himself. He in whose name Paul thinks he is persecuting the followers of Christ turns out to be the object of his persecution. His folly and the desired conversion really could not be greater.

But does Paul see more than just that light? It seems so. If Acts 9:7 is implicit regarding this point, Acts 9:17 (see below) leaves little room for doubt about whether Paul has really seen Christ in or surrounded by that light. After the statement that Paul was brought into Damascus, this part of the Biblical narrative is brought to a close by the mentioning that 'for three days [Paul] was without sight, and neither ate nor drank' (Acts 9:9). Then the perspective shifts to Ananias, a follower of Christ in Damascus whom God tells 'in a vision' [Vulgate: *in visu*] – he thus hears and sees Him – to go to the house where Paul

is staying, 'for behold', God's voice continues, 'he is praying, and he has seen a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight' [Vulgate: *ut visum recipiat*] (Acts 9:10–13). But Ananias resists: he knows Paul's reputation as a fanatical persecutor of Christians only too well (Acts 9:13–14). The Lord, however, will not relent: 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name' (Acts 9:15–16). Ananias then goes to the house where Paul is staying, lays hands on him and speaks the following words: 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit' [Vulgate: *Iesus qui apparuit tibi in via qua veniebas ut videas et implearis Spiritu Sancto*] (Acts 9:17). The Biblical text here continues: 'And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptised, and he took food and was strengthened' (Acts 9:18–19).

Ananias informs Paul very clearly and speaks of 'The Lord Jesus who appeared to you'. Paul himself is even more explicit in his description and explanation of what happened on the road to Damascus.<sup>36</sup> He provides this in two speeches, one in Jerusalem (Acts 22:1–21, esp. 6–16), the other in Caesarea (Acts 26:2–23, esp. 13–18).<sup>37</sup> While Acts 9:7 states that Paul's companions did hear the voice but did not see the light, Paul himself says the exact opposite in Acts 22:9, namely that they saw the light but did not hear the voice. In Acts 26 this point, however, is not brought up. But regardless of whether the companions experienced the light or the voice, it remains clear that only Paul saw Christ in that light. Acts 26:16–18 is very clear about this. Here Paul quotes Christ, after the latter had revealed himself to him, much more elaborately: 'for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you' [Vulgate: *testem eorum quae vidisti et eorum quibus apparebo tibi*]. While Paul presents the

<sup>36</sup> On the different versions of the history of his conversion in Acts, and Paul's own references to his conversion in the epistles, see Westbrook V., "Versions of Paul", in Holder R.W. (ed.), *A Companion to Paul in the Reformation, Brill's Companion to the Christian Tradition* 15 (Leiden – Boston: 2009) 429–463, esp. 429.

<sup>37</sup> For a detailed exegetic discussion of the three events, see Marguerat D., *The First Christian Historian. Writing the 'Acts of the Apostles'*, *Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Series* 121 (Cambridge: 2002) 179–204.



description of the content and meaning of his vision in Acts 26 – in Acts 26:19 he speaks of a ‘heavenly vision’ [Vulgate: *caelestis visionis*] – as coming from the mouth of Christ himself, in Acts 22 he has them being said by Ananias. The latter is also much more elaborate than in Acts 9. He starts with: ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight’, much shorter than in Acts 9:18. But after Paul describes how these words opened his eyes and he saw Ananias, the latter continues more voluminously than in Acts 9:18: ‘The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth;’ [Vulgate: *et videres Iustum et audires vocem ex ore eius*] ‘for you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard’ (Acts 22:14–16). Then Ananias invites Paul to allow himself to be baptised.

### *Paul the Visionary*

It follows from the rest of Paul’s speech that there was more than this one apparition. Paul has become a visionary who, after his conversion, as is shown at several moments in Acts, will repeatedly literally see and hear Christ, ‘the Just One’, as in Jerusalem, about which he says in Acts 22:17: ‘When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him [Vulgate: *fieri me in stupore mentis et videre illum*] saying to me, “Make haste and get quickly out of Jerusalem, because they will not accept your testimony about me”’. Paul, in doubt if he is truly capable of being God’s chosen instrument, had referred to his strict persecution of Christians and his involvement in the death of Stephen (Acts 22:19–20). But God was adamant: ‘Depart, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles’ (Acts 22:21). This reference to following apparitions – *stupore mentis*, as the Vulgate phrases it – is missing from Acts 26.

What really is the moment of conversion and what does this conversion entail exactly? Obviously, we may assume that the moment in which Paul converts coincides with the blinding by the light. It is, after all, the moment that artists see as the climax and prefer to portray. And not without reason, because this moment of revelation is in every way spectacular. Still, that connection only marks the beginning of the conversion process that lasts three days, the ‘three days’ that Paul, according to Acts 9:9, ‘was without sight, and neither ate nor drank’, a process that only ends with the laying on of hands by Ananias, an act which Paul, according to Acts 9:13–14, literally foresees. He is in

fact in a visionary state that comes hand in hand with abstinence from eating and drinking. According to Acts 9:11 Paul is also praying. One could say he is in a state of mind that is most receptive to spiritual matters. His physical blindness only reinforces that state of mind, and even forms a prerequisite: those who are physically blind and do not, or, as in Paul's case, can no longer be deceived by appearances, are better able to use their inner eye and see spiritually. Someone like that is more prone to supernatural influences that achieve the kind of radical transformation necessary for conversion.

As stated, Paul will remain a visionary. According to Acts 26:16 (Acts 9:16 and 22:15 contain similar wordings) he has 'to bear witness to the things in which you have seen me', i.e. the vision of God or Christ on the road to Damascus and 'to those in which I will appear to you', i.e. to those future visions of God or Christ, in or by which He will deliver him 'from the people and from the Gentiles', an example of which is described by Paul in his speech in Jerusalem (Acts 22:17). Being converted means someone has the ability to see God or Christ, which is to say, see them spiritually, just as Paul. At the moment his outer vision fails, his inner vision is activated. The former is even necessary – temporarily, at any rate – to make the latter possible. He must bear witness of these visions to those to whom he is sent (Acts 26:18). He is ordered to testify to his visionary experiences in order to give others a similar experience, so that their eyes, too, may be opened, meaning that they start seeing spiritually, turn away from the darkness in which they exist because of their blindness, and turn to the light, which they will be able to see after their blindness has been cured. Paul clarifies what this change entails in the rest of Acts 26:18 – to turn 'from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me'. Just as Ananias has opened Paul's eyes, Paul himself must open the eyes of those to whom he will preach the faith by telling them of his visions.

The conversion process is only complete at the moment in which Ananias lays his hands upon Paul, making sure that the latter can see and receive the Holy Ghost (Acts 9:16). Immediately following this, Paul allows himself to be baptised – probably by Ananias – and starts eating again. Baptism and the Holy Ghost are inseparable: the first leads to the second, and *vice versa*. The ability to see or meet God within is dependent on the presence, or in other words, the effects of that Ghost.

*Vision on Stage*

Now we turn to how the author of *The Conversion of Paul* has dramatised these Biblical elements. It may be taken for granted that sixteenth-century playwrights, certainly those who applied themselves to dramatising Biblical narratives from a reformatory conviction, read these events very carefully, and in the case of the conversion of Paul did not merely go through the different versions, but also took into account the theological, and especially soteriological, meaning of that conversion, *casu quo* the wording in which the description is presented. They would be predisposed, one would assume, to make that meaning explicit in the way they note and suggest verbal and visual actions.

If we approach the play from these two assumptions, it stands out that Paul does not just hear God's voice on the way to Damascus, he also sees Him. However, it is shown from the reactions of a Servant (*Dienaar*) that his companions only hear the voice (vs. 552). The heavens do indeed open for Paul, and that he sees God there follows from the words that Ananias later speaks to him (vss. 614–625):

Well met Saul, our fellow brother!  
 God, our saviour, the Lord of Lords,  
 Who has shown himself to you for the sake of your salvation  
 When you were coming here over the road –  
 That same Lord has sent me to you,  
 For you are robbed of the sight of your eyes,  
 Which was done to you by the heavenly light,  
 By the divine glimpse of heaven,  
 So that you were filled with the Holy Spirit  
 And cured of those wicked goads.  
 So I shall lay my hands upon your head.  
 Thank him and be not sad.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> 'Gegroet sijt *Saule*, ons medebroedere! / Godt ons behoedere // den Heere der heeren, / Die u openbaerden om dijns salicheyts vermeerden / Doen gij gwaemt passeren // byden wege hier ontrent – / De selue Heere heeft my tot u gesent, / Want gy syt blent // van dijns oogen gesichte, / Dwelck u verleent is vanden hemelschen lichte / Deur tgoddelyck gesichte // binnen shemels foreeste, / Soo dat gij veruult wert vanden heijligen geeste / En syt genezen vandie sondige heggen. / Dus sal ick mijn hant op u hoot nu leggen. / Wilt hem dack seggen sonder treuren'.

The speech by Ananias follows broadly Acts 9:17.<sup>39</sup> Paul is given a glimpse of heaven. Judging from the staging practices of the rhetoricians, it would have taken little effort to stage this 'divine glimpse'. On the first floor of the stage façade they used, there was a compartment, called the 'throne', that could be revealed by opening a curtain. There such heavenly scenes were traditionally staged. The light from heaven that flashed about him (Acts 9:3) would not have been left out. The rhetoricians were capable of achieving this by means of pyrotechnics.<sup>40</sup> While Paul is on the proscenium, God suddenly appears there above him, visible to him and to the audience, and a short dialogue unfolds between the two of them that closely follows the text of Acts 9:4–6. Paul and his companions then leave the stage through an exit in the façade at ground level. They enter, as it were, Damascus, as written in Acts 9:8. A so-called *pausa* follows, a short interval during which the stage is entirely empty.

The next scene opens, following Acts 9:10, with God summoning Ananias. Since Scripture leaves no doubt that this is done in a vision, a character representing God will again have been visible through the opening of the compartment on the first floor; He will not have just been a voice. Here it does, coincidentally, look as though God is shown in the guise of the Son. Ananias in fact addresses God by saying: 'You have asked Your Father on the cross to safeguard us from eternal punishment' ('Gij [hebt] uwen Vader aenden cruijse gebeden / Om ons beureden // voort eeuwich treuren'; vss. 600–601). When Ananias eventually heads out to the house where Paul is staying, this happens without the appearance of another *pausa*. Ananias probably does not perform much more than a knocking gesture in the direction of the ground level exit in the façade. A stage direction requires one of Paul's servants to ask who is there 'from inside' ('*Van binnen*'; vs. 604). It follows from the ensuing dialogue that Paul is in the compartment behind that exit, and that Ananias enters into it (vss. 612–613). The meeting with Paul does not take place on the proscenium, but in the space behind the façade, placed halfway or three quarters to the back

<sup>39</sup> The line 'and cured of those wicked goads' (vs. 623) seems to be inspired by a reading of Acts 26:14. The play's text speaks of 'heggen', which in modern Dutch means 'prikkels' ('goads' in English, *stimuli* in Latin).

<sup>40</sup> In the only other rhetoricians' play on the conversion of Paul, *De bekeringe van Sinte Paulus*, dated 1618 (Hummelen, *Repertorium* no. 1T2), according to the stage directions, there is a lighting effect that is created by igniting a handful of powdered resin with a candle (fol. 33r).

of the stage. There, the dialogue between Paul and Ananias unfolds, during which the previously quoted lines are spoken.

### *The Refrain*

During this scene, it is very likely that the upper compartment remains opened (or is opened again) to show God. This is indicated by the fact that Paul raises a refrain in laudation or gratitude to him [Figs. 1–2]. Ananias has called on him to do this in the last line of the cited speech. Normally, such a refrain is made up of four stanzas. In this case, there is only one stanza, which bears the characteristics of a 'prince' stanza. This concerns the last stanza of a refrain, in the first line of which the prince, that is the patron of the chamber of rhetoric, is traditionally addressed. Without fail, the word 'prince' or 'princely' is incorporated into the opening. In case of a laudatory refrain, the object of laudation takes the place of the chamber's prince, and as such is addressed or described using the word 'prince' or 'princely'.

This last element is present in the stanza under discussion: in the first line God is called 'princely Creator of creations' ('Prinselycke Scheppere der creaturen'; vs. 626). The direct addresses in this stanza are many, and are accompanied by exclamations such as 'Oh' ('O') and 'Ah' ('Och'). Moreover, a stage direction has Paul kneeling as he says this stanza, which is normally an indication that the object of adoration, God, is visible above, in the upper compartment. The wording that Paul uses to describe Him indicates that He is probably represented in the guise of the Father (Paul also uses this description in vs. 638).

It is likely that Paul shows himself to be emotionally affected while he speaks the refrain stanza. It fits the situation. He is after all going through a moment of spiritual vision, which, according to contemporary views, took place in the heart, the seat of the emotions. The refrain is indicative of this. The heightened aesthetics of this strophic form functions as a signal: 'the spectator is invited here to look at emotions through the charming glass of the art of rhetoric'.<sup>41</sup> However,

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<sup>41</sup> Coigneau D., "Emotions and Rhetoric in Rederijker Drama", in Lecuppre-Desjardin E. – Bruaene A.-L. Van (eds.), *Emotions in the Heart of the City (14th–16th century)*, *Studies in European Urban History (1100–1800)* 5 (Turnhout: 2005) 243–256; Coigneau D., "Strofische vormen in het rederijkerstoneel", in Ramakers B.A.M.



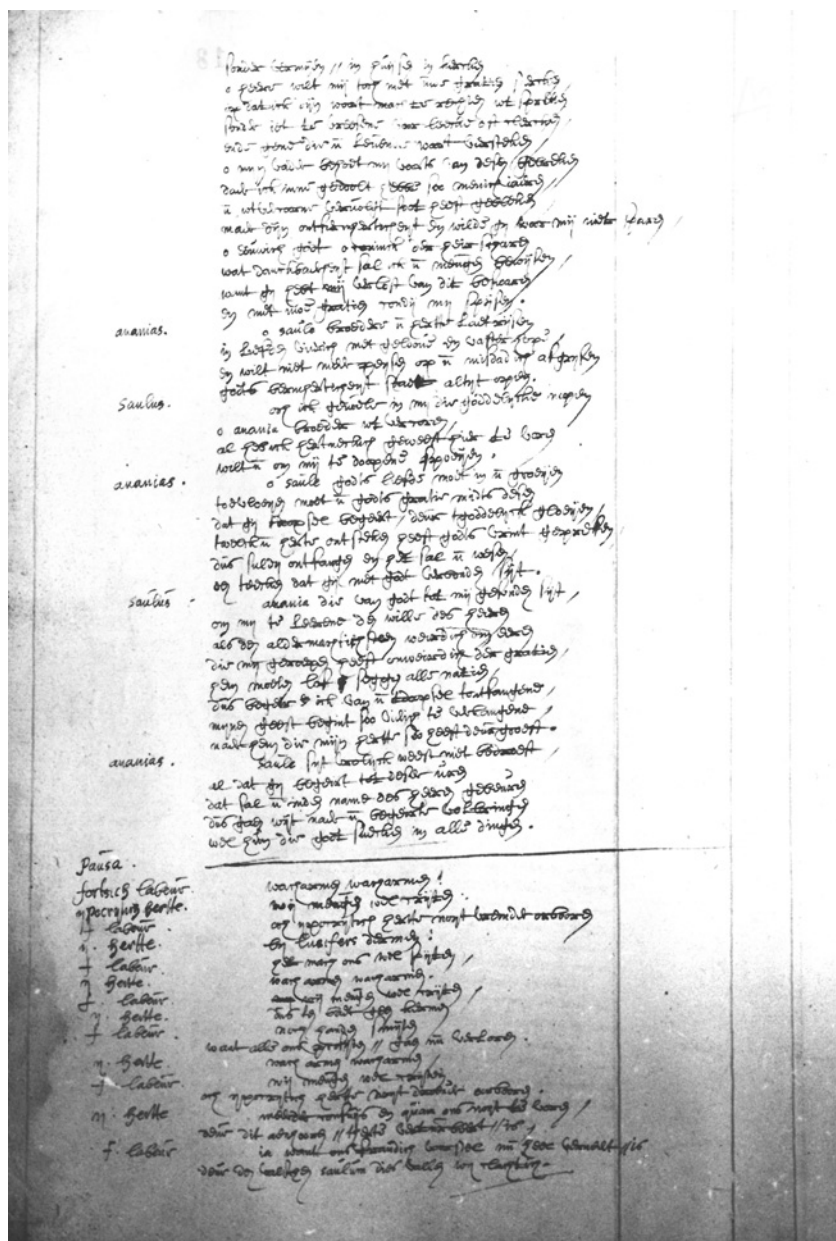


Fig. 2. *De Bekeeringe Pauli*, ms. 2166, fol. 54v, Brussels, Royal Library.

the effect is not just aesthetic, but also rhetorical in the sense that, through Paul, the audience is also moved and (at any rate, potentially) brought to a similar experience. Viewers are stimulated, just like him, to not just see spiritually but to be emotionally affected. Whether this happens highly depends, of course, on the quality of the staging, most importantly the acting skills of the actor playing Paul. In any case, the rhetoricians strived for a gripping, rhetorical style of acting that followed classical examples.<sup>42</sup> Certain bodily features or actions, kneeling being one of them, were presented as decisively significant.<sup>43</sup>

Aside from praise, the refrain also contains a representation of what is happening to Paul at that specific moment, and of the consequences he attributes to it. He describes how, as a result of the laying on of hands by Ananias, 'the scales fall from his eyes' ('de schellen glijen / Van mynen oogen'; vss. 629–630) and he will avow the name of God and will preach 'Your (living) Word' ('dijn woord'; vs. 635; 'u leuende woort'; vs. 637). He will do this 'in houses and churches' ('in huijsen in kercken'; vs. 633), without fearing 'laymen or clerics' ('leecke oft clercken'; vs. 436) – a choice of words that facilitates the identification of Paul with contemporary preachers. Essential in the interpretation of this speech, however, are phrases that do not appear in Acts: Paul's prayer for God to strengthen him with His grace ('wilt mij toch met uwe gratien stercken'; vs. 634) and the last line: 'and with your grace you can feed me' ('En met uwe gratien condij my spijsen'; vs. 645).

The usage of the noun 'grace' and the two verbs with which its reception is described, namely 'strengthen' and 'feed', is hardly obligatory here. Grace is, as stated, distributed directly by God, and the choice of words shows that it is seen metaphorically as food. It is quite possible that the lines from Acts 9:19, saying that Paul 'took food and was strengthened', encouraged the choice for 'strengthen' and 'feed'. Paul started eating again after he had regained his sight, had risen and was baptised (Acts 9:18).

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(ed.), *Spel in de verte. Tekst, structuur en opvoeringspraktijk van het rederijkerstoneel* [...], *Jaarboek Koninklijke Soevereine Hoofdkamer "De Fonteyne" te Gent* 51–52 (1991–1992) (Gent: 1994) 17–44, esp. 31–32.

<sup>42</sup> Coigneau, "Emotions and Rhetoric" 243–244; Ramakers, "In utramque partem" 203–204.

<sup>43</sup> Pfister, "Reading the body" 118.



The first of these three events is, as it turned out, explicitly referred to in the refrain stanza. The second probably takes place after Paul has ended the refrain stanza and rises from his kneeling position. This is suggested, at any rate, by the words of Ananias, who following his speech addresses him: 'Oh Saul, brother, lift up your heart' ('O Saule, broedere, u hertte laet rijsen'; vs. 646). Again it seems that a physical (outer) act, identified in Scripture, is transposed on stage to a spiritual (inner) act. In this case it happens in such a way that the physical act – that is, Paul rising up – is now actually shown, while at the same time clearly indicating a spiritual act, which is to say the lifting of his heart (which, due to the nature of things, can only be described in words).

### *Vision, Baptism, Spiritual Union*

The third event, the baptism, does not seem to be shown. The dialogue suggests that it takes place off stage. Ananias says that Paul 'desires' ('begeert'; vs. 656) baptism, and Paul himself twice pronounces this desire (vss. 653, 665). However, Ananias postpones the actual administering, which shows from the future form: 'This you shall receive and it shall be yours a sign that you are linked with God' ('Dus suldy ontfangen en het zal u wezen / Een teecken dat gij met Godt verbonden sijt'; vss. 658–659). And towards the end: 'All that you desire this hour shall be yours in the name of the Lord, so let us perform it to your desire' ('Al dat gy begeirt tot deser uren / Dat sal u inden name des Heeren gebeuren, / Dus gaen wijt naer u begeirte volbringen'; vss. 669–671). After this, they leave the stage. Possibly the baptism was not shown because it concerned a sacrament, a means of grace the administration of which, certainly in the Catholic tradition, was reserved for priests.

Ananias' visit is staged including all physical events that are named in Acts: the laying on of hands, the restoration of sight, the rising up, the baptism and the feeding, although the baptism, as noted, has been moved into the foreseeable future and the feeding is portrayed as purely spiritual. The order in the play has also been changed in comparison to that of the Bible. The fully spiritual feeding has emerged before Paul's rising, with the latter, as said, being portrayed in the play both spiritually (in word) and physically (in image).

This spiritualisation of physical events in Acts 19 requires further consideration. It is evident that the playwright puts a lot of effort into the metaphysical meaning of everything that befalls Paul on the road

to, and in Damascus. Scripture offers leads for this, and they are taken up in the play. According to Acts 9:17, Ananias lays his hands on Paul before the latter is filled with the Holy Ghost. In the play, this fulfilment (or the desire for it) is brought into express connection with Paul's vision. This shows from the speech cited earlier (vs. 622). The Holy Ghost appears to follow the vision, but at the same time it is the force that makes spiritual vision possible.<sup>44</sup> In a later speech, Ananias proposes the 'reception' ('Toevloeyen'; vs. 655) of the Ghost as the reward for Paul's desire to get baptised, which is also linked with the vision. It seems obvious that the formulation 'the divine glow, that has kindled your heart' ('tgoddelyck gloeijen, / Twelck u herte ontsteken heeft'; vss. 656–657) can be interpreted as an alternate description of 'the divine glimpse into heaven' ('tgoddelyck gesichte binnen shemels foreeste'; vs. 621).

The growing rapport between Paul and God, their meeting in Paul's heart that ultimately leads to a permanent commitment through baptism, is described in terms that show a reasoned vision on this process. When Ananias urges Paul to raise his heart and to rise up, he must do so 'in fiery love, with faith and steady hope' ('In liefden vierich met gelooue en vaster hope'; vs. 647), so with the three theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. In order to be able to see spiritually, man needs a kind of divine enlightenment that is experienced as grace. In the context of spiritual vision it refers to sanctifying grace, the favour or mercy by which man is entitled to share in the beatific vision, to partake in God's divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), to be unified with him (Vulgate: *participatio divinae naturae*). Paul has by now received that grace. The naming of the three theological virtues is also significant. Rather than the cardinal virtues, they refer to character qualities associated with salvation, supernatural gifts that are revealed or infused by God and have him as their immediate and proper object. They prepare man for the vision of or unification with him. Sensory vision is impossible without light. The same is true for spiritual vision. The physical light in which Paul sees Christ is the perceivable version of the spiritual light that also surrounds him and that is needed to see or interpret Him inwardly. Of that spiritual light, it is said that it is spread primarily

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<sup>44</sup> Moser, *De strijd voor rhetorica* 161–162. On the location and meaning of the reception of the Holy Ghost in the story of Paul's conversion, see: Porter, *The Paul of Acts* (Tübingen: 1999) 70–72.

by Faith, the first theological virtue.<sup>45</sup> The association with light also characterises the Holy Ghost, the receiving of grace, and baptism.

There is a third passage where the link between vision and baptism is established, this time by Paul himself. At the end of his final speech, before he leaves the stage together with Ananias, he says how 'fiery' ('vierich'; vs. 666) his spirit desires him 'who has thus fathomed my heart' ('die mijn hertte soo heeft deurgroeft'; vs. 667), words that remind strongly of the earlier words on the divine glow that had kindled his heart. The word 'heart' ('her(t)tte') has been mentioned three times now, a word that does not appear in the various versions of the conversion story in Acts. The playwright's choice of words again is not obligatory here, but emerges from a strong internalised faith wherein the heart is synonymous to the soul and functions as the place where spiritual images are perceived and stored. It is the location of the inner eye, of spiritual vision. It is here that the divine glimpse has taken place, the interface as it were, between heaven and earth, where the blinded Paul is enabled through means other than physical to glimpse 'up', or see 'through', at that which is no longer visible to the physical eye. What the audience sees on stage, especially Paul's vision, is the externalisation of what goes on inside him, judging by the playwright's choice of words. Here God or Christ has 'fathomed' ('deurgroeft'; vs. 667) him, and has 'kindled' ('ontsteken'; vs. 657) him with his 'glow' ('gloeijen').

In the heart resided the emotive functions (or faculties) of the so-called sensitive soul that held a position between the lower vegetative soul and the higher intellective soul.<sup>46</sup> The functions of cognition and voluntary motion, which were part of the sensitive soul as well, had their seat in the brain. These faculties were served, amongst others, by the sense organs. In the sixteenth century the perceptual faculties – the internal and external senses – attracted much more attention than any other faculties of the organic soul. Of the external senses, sight was deemed the most prominent. The sensible forms or images of material objects, including bodies, perceived by the external senses were

<sup>45</sup> Moser, *De strijd voor rhetorica* 155, 158.

<sup>46</sup> Park K., "Psychology: The Organic Soul", in Schmitt C.B. et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge: 1988) 464–484, esp. 467, 469. Although the soul was located everywhere in the body, and liver and brain also fulfilled functions of the soul, following Aristotle the heart was seen as the main seat of the soul (Park, "Psychology" 482).

consequently processed by the internal senses, which furthermore bridged the gap between the external senses, limited to the knowledge of particulars, and the highest cognitive operation, that of intellection, located in the intellective soul. Leaving aside for now the names and operations of the internal senses, it is important to make clear that the images received by the external senses, after having been processed by the internal senses, might be impressed on an internal medium, one of them being the heart, where they could provoke emotive reactions.

### *A Protestant Play?*

The play's editor, G. Jo Steenbergen, is not incorrect when he interprets the various speeches of the citizens in the play's prologue and of the allegorical characters in their respective scenes as referring to sixteenth-century current events, in which the church attempted to limit the free preaching of the Bible and the independent religious thinking by laymen.<sup>47</sup> In some speeches it is even possible to find allusions to the inquisition. This does not, however, make the anonymous author a Protestant in the denominational sense, or a follower of one or the other reformatory faction. Thus, Steenbergen himself remarks that in the play no criticism is levelled at the Church as an institution, at the sacraments or at the performance of good works, to name but a few hallmarks of the Catholic faith.<sup>48</sup>

How can we describe and interpret the religious attitude that emerges from this play? Before positing an answer to that question, it is necessary to differentiate four more or less latent views on the religious situation in the sixteenth century. In the first place, it should not be assumed that the story of Paul's conversion lends itself exclusively to reformatory explanations. It might have been cited primarily by Protestants, but Catholics, too, were able to work well with its content. Secondly, the fact that he is called the apostle of the Reformation – after all, the reformers based their insights mainly on his letters – does not allow for the conclusion that Paul had lost his attractiveness to Catholic theologians.<sup>49</sup> Thirdly, to assume that the Reformation presents a

<sup>47</sup> Steenbergen, *De Bekeeringe Pauli* 29–32.

<sup>48</sup> Steenbergen, *De Bekeeringe Pauli* 29.

<sup>49</sup> On Luther's reception of Paul, see Mattox M.L., "Martin Luther's Reception of Paul", in Holder R.W. (ed.), *A Companion to Paul in the Reformation*, Brill's

radical break with tradition goes too far, even in the specialised field of theology or soteriology, where historians of the Reformation claim Luther caused a revolution.<sup>50</sup> Certainly, the principle of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) led to an assault on the medieval penitential system and, by consequence, on the institution that upheld it.<sup>51</sup> But this refers to the principle at its extreme, where all emphasis is laid on the assumption that *only* faith justifies and that it entailed an unearned gift from God. In its emphasis on the importance for man's justification of genuine faith in Christ's redeeming death, however, it fitted developments that had already emerged in late medieval times and continued under humanist influence in the sixteenth century.<sup>52</sup> Fourthly, reading the Bible and showing knowledge of Scripture was not unique to Protestants. Catholics also did this, and did so before the appearance in print of complete (Protestant) translations.

The previously posed question, then, can best be answered by asking a different question: to what kind of conversion was the play attempting to bring the audience? Just as Augustine's conversion has been called a 'conversion by the book',<sup>53</sup> here we find a conversion by the play. The nature of that conversion was actually neutral with regards to denomination and left the faithful free to draw further reaching conclusions from that which was shown, conclusions that were relevant to the current religious situation, theology, or ecclesiastical practices.<sup>54</sup> That is, if they so wished. But neither in the prologue nor in the play itself is any attempt made in this direction. The attractiveness

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*Companion to the Christian Tradition* 15 (Leiden – Boston: 2009) 93–128. For a correction on the exclusive claim on Paul by the reformatory faction, see: Holder R.W., "Introduction – Paul in the 16th Century: Invitation and a Challenge", in Holder R.W. (ed.), *A Companion to Paul in the Reformation, Brill's Companion to the Christian Tradition* 15 (Leiden – Boston: 2009) 1–12, esp. 7 and several other contributions in the collection edited by him.

<sup>50</sup> MacCulloch D., *A History of Christianity. The First Three Thousand Years* (London: 2009) 607–609.

<sup>51</sup> MacCulloch, *A History* 607–609; Collinson P., *The Reformation* (London: 2003) 48; Cameron E., *The European Reformation* (Oxford: 1991) 117–123, 132–133.

<sup>52</sup> Cameron, *The European Reformation* 83–87; Wooding L.E.C., *Rethinking Catholicism in Reformation England* (Oxford: 2000) 8, *passim*.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Russell F.H., "Augustine: Conversion by the Book", in Muldoon J., *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages* (Gainesville, Fl. etc.: 1997) 13–30.

<sup>54</sup> A similar interpretation is possible for Netherlandish paintings and prints. See on this: Falkenburg R.L., "Bijbelse iconografie en spiritualiteit: enkele beschouwingen over de Nederlandse schilderkunst en grafiek van de zestiende eeuw", *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 15, 1 (1988) 5–15.

of Paul's conversion traditionally came from the paradox 'that the greatest sinners make the greatest saints'.<sup>55</sup> This must have been a comforting thought for the audience. The interest in the conversion of Paul fits the increased attention, starting in the fifteenth century, for the inner piety of believers. For Erasmus, innovator but not Protestant, Paul was 'the ideal proponent of *pietas litterata*, of learned devotion to Christ in a life of humility'.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, it was on the basis of passages from the letters of Erasmus that authors *before* Luther developed a 'theology-for-piety', which was aimed at changing one's inner relationship to God, just as the story of the conversion of Paul shows.<sup>57</sup> Historians of religion point in this context to the *Devotio Moderna*, which has left its mark on late medieval religiosity in the Low Countries. It propagated a style of devotion which was intense and inward-looking, personalised, Christ-centred and Biblically based, and which was expressly propagated among laypeople.<sup>58</sup>

At stake in this devotion was the restoration of the disturbed relationship (disrupted by original sin) with God. Already in medieval times, man's inability before God was emphasised. Humankind had good reason to fear God's punishment and could grow desperate because of this.<sup>59</sup> At the same time, the importance of grace was emphasised, primarily grace in the form of love. While Luther would emphasise the importance of faith, Catholic theologians before him put emphasis on the virtues of hope and charity – all three are named in *The Conversion of Paul*: 'Faith enlists the intellectus and ratio to understand the divine truth, hope like love is a way of life which directs the heart's emotions to God loving kindness'.<sup>60</sup> In other words: the process of salvation comes down to an emotional process in the heart or soul,

<sup>55</sup> Snyder S., "The Left Hand of God: Despair in Medieval and Renaissance Tradition", *Studies in the Renaissance* 12 (1965) 18–59, esp. 26.

<sup>56</sup> Faber R.A., "Desiderius Erasmus' Representations of Paul as Paragon of Learned Piety", in Holder R.W. (ed.), *A Companion to Paul in the Reformation, Brill's Companion to the Christian Tradition* 15 (Leiden – Boston 2009) 43–60, esp. 49.

<sup>57</sup> Wicks S.J.J., "Johann von Staupitz under Pauline Inspiration", in Holder R.W. (ed.), *A Companion to Paul in the Reformation, Brill's Companion to the Christian Tradition* 15 (Leiden – Boston: 2009) 326.

<sup>58</sup> MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity* 599; Collinson, *The Reformation* 15, 17–19; MacCulloch D., *Reformation. Europe's house divided* (London: 2003) 22, 75, 93, 102; Hamm B., *The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety*, ed. R.J. Bast (Leiden – Boston: 2004) 12.

<sup>59</sup> Snyder, "The Left Hand of God" 21; MacCulloch, *Reformation*. 110–111; Hamm, *The Reformation of Faith* 125.

<sup>60</sup> Hamm, *The Reformation of Faith* 158.

with hope and love as the most important emotions, and good will as the driving force.<sup>61</sup> The scholastic understanding of justification came down to grace shown in love.<sup>62</sup> To put it in Paul's own words: 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us' (Rom. 5:5). In the story of the conversion of Paul, this is brought clearly to the fore. God's grace is equal to his love, with which he speaks directly to the heart. The fire of his love sets the heart, as it were, ablaze.<sup>63</sup> In *The Conversion of Paul* these metaphors of fire and light in relation to the heart are capitalised on.

It does not do justice to the Catholic doctrine of grace to reduce it to 'active righteousness based on obedience to commands', opposite which the 'passive righteousness imputed by grace through faith alone' is then set by the Reformation.<sup>64</sup> Grace played an essential part in Catholic doctrine too. In its decree on salvation, the Council of Trent determined that God takes the initiative in salvation through grace, but does so in keeping with the free will of man, who could assist in that grace. There was a difference between originating (or first) grace, which rests on no foreseen human merit, and justifying (or second) grace. The first was also sometimes called prevenient grace, the second sanctifying grace. The first allowed humanity to discover their sins and created the desire to reconcile with God, to become justified.<sup>65</sup> The second entailed the actual justification, in which God reconciled himself with mankind through love in the way mentioned earlier. Either believers waited in penitent sorrow for sanctifying grace, which would consequently inspire them to good works, or they could 'hurry to receive the sacraments of the Church to find the grace of God that the sacraments offer, including performing penances'.<sup>66</sup>

### Conclusion

The conversion of Paul is presented as an inner transformation that brings the protagonist into a (renewed) personal, inner relationship

<sup>61</sup> Hamm, *The Reformation of Faith* 90, 94.

<sup>62</sup> Hamm, *The Reformation of Faith* 187.

<sup>63</sup> Hamm, *The Reformation of Faith* 133, 144, 151; Knuuttila, *Emotions* 161; Wicks, "Johann von Staupitz" 328, 331.

<sup>64</sup> Mattox, "Martin Luther's Reception of Paul" 112.

<sup>65</sup> Wicks, "Johann von Staupitz" 327–328; MacCulloch, *Reformation* 112.

<sup>66</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation* 112.

with God or Christ. It is this relationship that is presented to the audience as an example, as a model to be emulated. The theatrical expression of emotion felt in the heart, as it is presented in *The Conversion of Paul*, can be interpreted as an illustration of what John Martin calls the 'invention of sincerity'. 'In the Renaissance generally and in the sixteenth century in particular', he writes, 'we see a new emphasis on inwardness or the idea of an interior self as the core of personal identity'.<sup>67</sup> It pertains to a general, humanistic trend that transcends differences in faith. As exponents of the urban middle class, the rhetoricians seem to have wanted to contribute to the creation of such an identity through means of theatre. The emphasis that is put on the heart and its enlightenment by the Holy Ghost in this play (and in many other rhetoricians' plays for that matter) should certainly not be interpreted as a form of spiritualism in the meaning attributed to the reformatory faction that lent its name to it,<sup>68</sup> nor as a form of religious compromise.<sup>69</sup> We are dealing with a kind of inwardness that fits an older, late medieval tradition. Insofar as the playwright wanted to engage in propaganda, he did so for an attitude to faith that transcended contemporary religious controversy, and that, due to its intimate, individual nature, was not directly connected with, let alone dependent on, any theological persuasion, denomination or church. This leaves unobstructed the possibility that author and audience could have felt more or less close to some existing or developing denomination. They, however, did not seem to see such a confession as the core of their religion.

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<sup>67</sup> Martin J., "Inventing Sincerity, Refashioning Prudence: The Discovery of the Individual in Renaissance Europe", *The American Historical Review* 102, 5 (1997) 1309–1342, esp. 1322. See also Martin J.J., *Myths of Renaissance Individualism* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: 2004). On late medieval inwardness, see Bryan J., *Looking Inward. Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: 2008) 36–42, passim.

<sup>68</sup> For a description, see Stayer J.M. – Roth J.D. (eds.), *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521–1700* (Leiden: 2007) and for a recent overview of this movement in the Low Countries: Buys R., *De kunst van het weldenken. Lekenfilosofie en volkstalig rationalisme in de Nederlanden (1550–1600)* (Amsterdam: 2009) 217–250.

<sup>69</sup> Waite G.K., "Rhetoricians and Religious Compromise During the Early Reformation (c. 1520–1555)", in Happé P. – Strietman E., *Urban Theatre in the Low Countries 1400–1625* (Turnhout: 2006) 79–102. Also see the – here disputed – interpretation of the play in Waite, *Reformers on Stage* 179–182.



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## RHETORICS OF THE PULPIT

Xander van Eck

*In memory of professor Josua Bruyn*

### *Introduction: furniture or theatre?*

The church of the Leliendael convent of Norbertine nuns, built in 1678 by Lucas Fayd'herbe, was a stately but fairly modest presence in the centre of the archiepiscopal city of Mechlin. This changed in 1721, when a new pulpit was commissioned that would turn the interior into an unforgettable spectacle. It would require two years and tons of oak to build, cost about 4,000 guilders, and involve the collaboration of two sculptors' workshops. The behemoth that resulted from this undertaking covered a large section of the south wall of the Leliendael church, and remained in place until the nuns were chased out by Napoleon's armies. It was then transferred to nearby St. Rombout Cathedral, a church ten times bigger, where it was fitted around a pillar of the nave [Figs. 1, 2].<sup>1</sup> Originally, the pulpit presented itself 'almost in low relief', as an eighteenth-century visitor remarked [Fig. 3].<sup>2</sup>

At ground level, we see the life-size figure of the founding saint of the Norbertine order, who, having been struck by lightening, falls off his horse and is converted. He is surrounded by rocks that, one level higher, form the basis of a crucifixion group with Mary and John the Evangelist, again consisting of life-size figures. The converted saint and horse look in the direction of the crucified Christ. As a consequence, the crucifixion group can be interpreted as an apparition to Norbert, which also presents itself to the congregants in front of the pulpit.

To the right of the crucifixion, part of the rock formation creates the actual space for the priest to stand and deliver his message, a space he is able to reach via a flight of stairs roughly carved out of the rocks

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<sup>1</sup> Geese S., *Kirchenmöbel und Naturdarstellung. Kanzeln in Flandern und Brabant* (Ammersbeck bei Hamburg: 1997) 137–152.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Baptiste Descamps, *Voyage pittoresque de la Flandre et du Brabant* (Paris: Desaint, Saillant, Pissot, Durand: 1769) opp. p. 130.



Fig. 1. Michiel Vervoort and Theodoor Verhagen, *Pulpit with the conversion of St. Norbert* (1721–1723). Mechlin, St. Rombout Cathedral (formerly Mechlin, Leliendael convent of Norbertine nuns).



Fig. 2. *Pulpit with the conversion of St. Norbert, detail.*

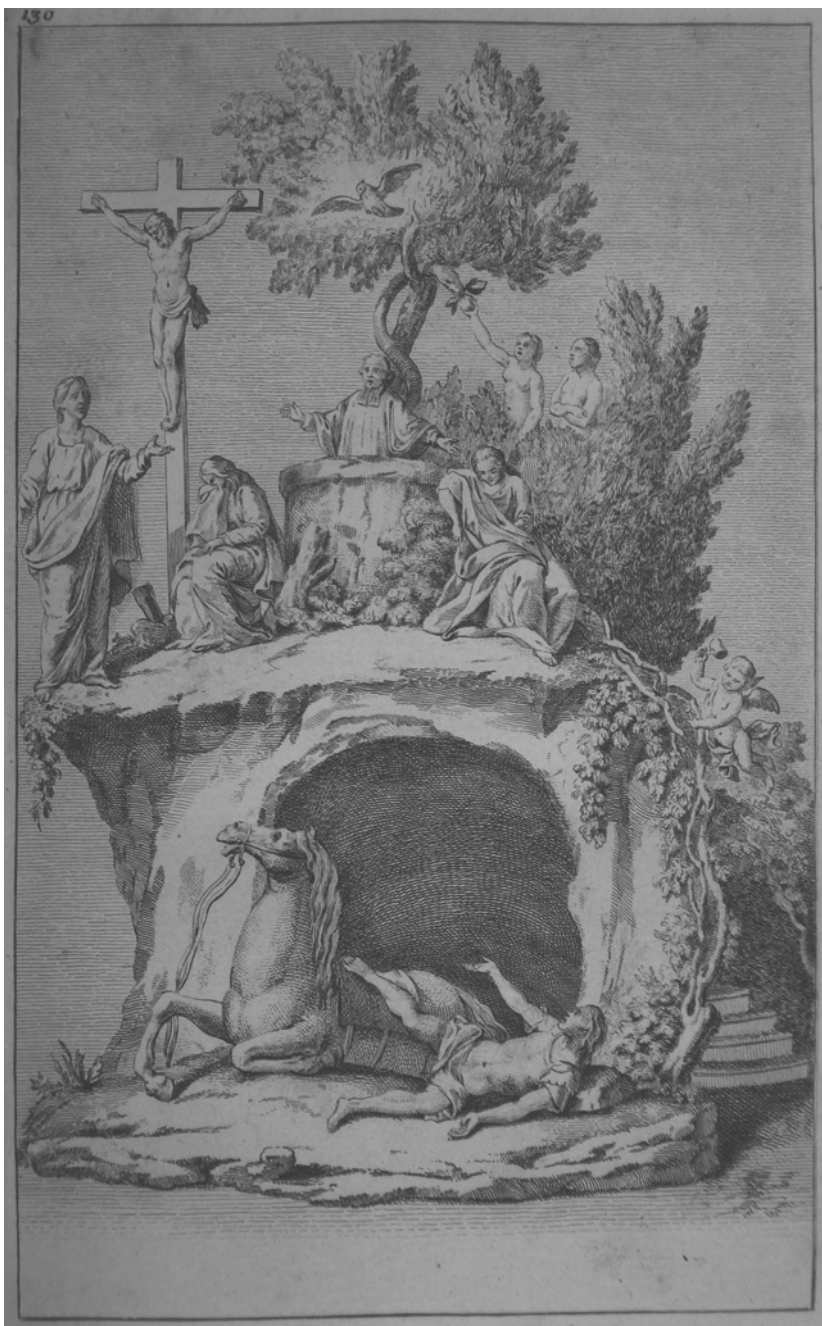


Fig. 3. Anonymous engraver, *The pulpit at the Leliendael convent*, illustration in Jean-Baptiste Descamps, *Voyage pittoresque de la Flandre et du Brabant*, (Paris, Desaint, Saillant, Pissot, Durand: 1769).



to the right. Enhancing the impression of naturalness and liveliness, a multitude of animals inhabit the environment: all kinds of lizards, squirrels, and birds rummage about. The sculptural play with wood is a marvel of its own: at several places, trees are growing on the rocks, while smoothed branches have been used as hand supports along the stairs, and the door leading to the podium appears to have been made from rough, weathered planks. In reality, of course, everything was newly sculpted out of large blocks of oak.

On the other side of the rostrum, we see the figure of Mary Magdalene sitting in a pose of penitence and reverence; in the bushes towards the back, the torsos of Adam and Eve are shown in half relief, with Eve reaching for the fruit provided by the snake wrapped around the tree of knowledge. Essentially a piece of church furniture, this pulpit denies its static furniture-ness as much as it can. It dynamically acts as a stage that contextualizes for the audience the theological truths spoken by the priest.

Although some adjustments had to be made to fit the ensemble into its current environment, its iconography has generally remained intact and its impact remains very direct, even on the modern-day viewer. Conversion is clearly this pulpit's theme – an appropriate subject, as the turn of the soul was also a central element of most of the sermons that would have been given in the era of its conception. Starting from the Leliendael example, this article will focus on the ways in which patrons in the Southern Netherlands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries sought to utilize pulpits to strengthen the message of the sermon.

From the accounts of the Leliendael church, we know that the artist responsible for the design was Michiel Vervoort, an Antwerp sculptor of great renown.<sup>3</sup> He made two clay models for it, both preserved in the Mechlin municipal museum. Additional evidence for the amount of preparation involved in this project is a larger clay model for the figure of Mary Magdalene, now in the Antwerp Museum of Fine Arts.<sup>4</sup> The life-size sculptures in the round were done in Vervoort's Antwerp workshop. Interestingly, the accounts mention specifically selected

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<sup>3</sup> Geese, *Kirchenmöbel* 53–160. The full text of the accounts is published in Appendix nr. 8, pp. 198–202.

<sup>4</sup> Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen, coll. Van Herck, inv. 31.

blocks of oak – one, for instance, described as ‘sent to Master Vervoort for making [the figure of] Norbert’.

On completion, the sculptures were sent to Mechlin, where the workshop of Theodoor Verhagen was responsible for assemblage and the creation of most of the rocks and vegetation. Also noteworthy is that, after everything had been installed, Vervoort’s son Joseph added some painted areas of ‘air and shadow’,<sup>5</sup> which undoubtedly functioned to merge the pulpit more naturally with the wall it was placed against, thereby heightening the illusionism of the installation.

The interior decoration of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Catholic churches and the rituals performed there are often referred to as the ‘*theatrum sacrum*’. In art historical literature, the theatre piece usually referred to is the ritual of Mass, in which the elevation of the host is the climax. Indeed, our understanding of most altarpieces is incomplete without taking into account their role as backdrops for the Eucharist. One might even argue that the theatrical possibilities of the sermon were broader than that of the ritual of Mass, which hardly offered room for dramatic expression and lacked an element of surprise. In the pulpit, however, the priest could employ all the dramatic and rhetorical talents he possessed in order to cajole, entertain, scare, and seduce his listening audience. As the natural backdrop for the dramatic event of the sermon, the pulpit offered enormous decorative possibilities – possibilities that were nowhere exploited as fully as in the Southern Netherlands during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The eighteenth-century author Jean-Baptiste Descamps, to whose *Voyage pittoresque de la Flandre et du Brabant* (1769) we owe so much of our knowledge of the original interiors of Flemish churches, must have realized that the pulpit was a stage that needed an actor. He devoted one of the few illustrations in his book to the Leliendael pulpit, and had a priest included, whose arms are dramatically cast open as if in the midst of preaching [Fig. 3].<sup>6</sup> The picture also makes clear that the sculptures of the saint and biblical figures are life-size, which allowed the priest to blend into the decor all the easier.

<sup>5</sup> Geese, *Kirchenmöbel* 201.

<sup>6</sup> Descamps, *Voyage pittoresque* ill. opp. p. 130.

*Sermons and Conversion*

As rhetorical performances, individual sermons are ephemeral phenomena. While handwritten sermons from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have not yet been systematically studied, Gerrit vanden Bosch's book *Hemel, Hel en Vagevuur* (Heaven, Hell and Purgatory) masterfully describes the exemplary sermon books that were available to priests in the Dutch language from the end of the sixteenth century onwards. Comparison with some of the surviving handwritten sermons of the time has shown that, of course, individual preachers chose different words and applied their own nuances and inventions, but the general content of most sermons closely approached that of the exemplary, published ones, particularly in the Southern Netherlands during the Counter-Reformation.<sup>7</sup>

Although the Council of Trent signaled the beginning of a concerted effort to fight the Protestant Reformation, we must not forget that it also led to a return to the sources of religion and a cultural offensive to educate and evangelize the masses within the Catholic Church – reason enough for a growing emphasis on the pulpit in the Catholic church interior. The stakes were high. The priests were the last link in the hierarchical chain that connected the faithful with the realm of the Holy, which put the burden of their salvation squarely on the shoulders of the parish leaders. The demands on the behaviour of parishioners were heavy as well, as the ascetic ideal of urban monastic communities increasingly determined the moral set of rules that was deemed appropriate for regular citizens. The priest was constantly at risk of losing to the devil the souls he was entrusted to shepherd, and this threat was consistently reflected in his sermons.

The most effective way to become a just and devout Christian was to turn away from the matters of the material world and focus on the hereafter. Sermons abounded with formulations about the futility of earthly desires and aspirations, comparing them with child's play and much worse.<sup>8</sup> The world, according to one of the exemplary sermons,

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<sup>7</sup> Bosch G. vanden, *Hemel, hel en vagevuur. Preken over het hiernamaals* (Leuven: 1991) 15–28.

<sup>8</sup> Bosch vanden, *Hemel* 31–110.

was nothing but 'a prison, a banishment, a valley of tears, a sea full of dangers, a place of misery, full of sadness and weeping'.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, the priests would usually observe that, in practice, fornicating, jealousy, greed and ambition abounded among their flock. To counter this dangerous behaviour, they would often highlight the Bible's emphasis on the small number of people to inherit the kingdom of heaven, and the large number of those who are doomed to eternal life in hell. The Jesuit Franciscus Costerus, one of the early authors of exemplary sermons, provided a method for people to determine to which group they belonged. On the one hand, 'compare your own life path to the worldly folk, who follow their bad inclinations to eat, drink, and pursue honour and temporary wealth'; on the other hand, see yourself in comparison to those who 'reign in Heaven with Christ, like Francis, Dominic and Ignatius and many others the holy Church considers Saints'.<sup>10</sup> This was exactly how the Church after Trent preferred its saints: not as miracle makers from whom one could ask favours, but as ideal role models for the faithful.

The next step in the priest's fear-mongering tactics was to threaten his listeners with the horrors of hell. Starting out by evoking the pain caused by holding one's finger in the flame of a candle for fifteen minutes, the priest would assure his audience that the fire in hell was a thousand times more painful, that it hurt not just a finger but the whole body, and that it would last not fifteen minutes but forever.

In the end, the goal of this whole exercise was to bring about spiritual conversion. As appears from this quick summary of Vanden Bosch's conclusions, we are not talking about a conversion from heathendom to Christianity, or from Protestantism to Catholicism, but a conversion

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<sup>9</sup> 'Wat is de wereld anders als eene gevangenisschap, eene ballingschap, een traenen-dal, eene zee vol gevaeren, eene plaets van ellenden, vol droefheyd en geweent?' In Ignatius Albertus de Vloo, *Sermoenen*, 13 vols. (Brugge, Joseph de Busscher: 1788–1794) vol. IV, 67–68.

<sup>10</sup> 'Gheen beter remedie om seker te wesen oft ghy onder de luttel oft onder de veel zijt, en isser, dan dickmael u leven ende wercken t'overlegghen, oft die accorderen met den grooten hoop, dat is, met de wereltsche lieden, die hun quaede gheneghentheden in eten, drinken, begeerlijckheydt van eere en tijdtlijck goet, etc. volghen: oft met de cleyne hoop, daer wy van veel seker af zijn dat sy nu in den hemel met Christo regeren, als Franciscus, Dominicus, Ignatius, ende ontallijcke andere, die de heylige Kercke voor Heylighen houdt. Volghdy die Heylighen, soo mooghdy wel hopen: volghdy de wereldt, soo mooghdy wel vreesen'. In Franciscus Costerus, *Veerthien Catholijcke sermoenen op de evangelien der sondaghen van den advent tot den vasten* (Antwerp, Ioachim Tragnesijs: 1601) 236.

from being a 'sinful Catholic' grounded in the pleasures of the world to a 'righteous Catholic' who models his or her life after saintly examples of spiritual maturity. That was what most of the sermons were about in the end: to urge the audience to give up its sinful ways, and convert to an existence in which they would truly follow Christ.

*St. Norbert: role model*

As mentioned above, listeners were often asked to compare themselves with saints in order to judge whether they were choosing the right path in life. This rhetorical device was used not only in sermons, but also in religious songs and devotional exercises, as well as in the visual arts. Providing audiences with easily accessible role models who could help them identify with the subject in an affective way was a stock strategy of Counter-Reformation art, as illustrated by Caravaggio's *Calling of St. Matthew* from ca. 1599. The painting invites the viewer to identify with the future disciple, who points at himself, apparently asking, 'Do you really mean ME?'

One reason many saints were so effective as role models in the context of conversion was the fact that they, too, once had been sinners, until at a certain moment they 'saw the light', as it were, and changed their ways. St. Norbert, the founding saint of the Norbertine order, also fit this description. His seventeenth-century biographer Joannes Chrysostomus van der Sterre, prior of the Antwerp Norbertine convent of St. Michael, tells how Norbert, as a young gentleman of noble birth, was destined for a clerical career by his parents and became a canon of the Xanten church of St. Victor at a young age. Unfortunately, even as he reached maturity, he followed the ways of the world more than the calling of the Holy Ghost. He was a well-spoken, pleasant, and handsome young man, but 'alas', in Van der Sterre's words, 'bewitched and robbed of his wits by drinking from the wicked brew of Babylon'.<sup>11</sup> One day, however, when he was in the neighborhood of Cleves, a terrifying thunderstorm broke loose, during which God spoke to Norbert: 'Norbert, Norbert, why do you persecute me?' Soon

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<sup>11</sup> Joannes Chrysostomus van der Sterre, *Het leven van den H. Norbertus Stichtvader der ordre van Praemonstreyt ende apostel van Antwerpen* (Antwerp, Geeraerd van Wolsschaten: 1623) 34.

after, lightening struck the ground just in front of his horse, causing it to throw off Norbert, leaving him in the sand unconscious for an hour.<sup>12</sup>

Obviously, this story is rife with echoes of the biblical account of Saul's conversion, a feature that is amply elaborated upon by Van der Sterre. After Norbert regained consciousness, he started to speak like St. Paul, who was converted in much the same way, saying: 'Lord, what do you want me to do?'<sup>13</sup> With so many parallels between the two stories, it is no wonder that the depiction of Norbert's conversion in Vervoort's pulpit is based on the iconographic tradition of the conversion of the biblical saint. The sculptor would certainly have known the print of the Conversion of St. Paul by Schelte à Bolswert after Rubens's painting of the same subject (currently in Munich).<sup>14</sup>

After his conversion, Norbert became a holy man, fanatically preaching the word of the Lord, soon crushing the heresy of the Antwerp priest Tanchelm, and founding the first convent of the Norbertine order in the valley of Prémontré in the year 1120. All in all, Norbert was an excellent role model: he had tasted the pleasures of the world, but in a flash of a moment experienced the Holy Spirit's divine intervention and changed his life. Judging from the central position of Norbert's conversion on the pulpit, we can gather that his story was not only important for the members of the Norbertine order themselves, but also served as an example to follow for anyone who came to hear their sermons preached. The priests' words were to be Spirit-filled revelation to those who would listen, just as the lightening and conversation with the Almighty were to Norbert.

Indeed, St. Norbert and his horse at the floor level of the Mechlin pulpit were part of an ensemble that, in its entirety, formed a unity that reflected the logic of the generic Southern Netherlandish sermon of the Counter-Reformation. The viewer is subject to original sin and, similar to Norbert before his conversion, under constant temptation to follow the devil's way, as in the example of Adam and Eve in the background. In contrast, in front of Adam and Eve, the audience is urged

<sup>12</sup> Sterre van der, *Het leven* 40–41: 'Norberte, Norberte, wat wildt ghy my vervolgen?'

<sup>13</sup> Sterre van der, *Het leven* 42: 'heeft begonst in sy selve te spreken / met den heylighen Paulus / die oock by-naest op dese maniere bekeert is: Heere wat wilt ghy dat ick doen sal?' (cf. Acts of the Apostles 6:9).

<sup>14</sup> Hollstein F.W.H., *Dutch and Flemish etchings, engravings and woodcuts* (1949, Schelte à Bolswert 196–II).

by Mary Magdalene to turn away from its wicked ways (literally her back faces the Genesis figures) and to repent with deep remorse. As we see in the engraving of the Leliendael pulpit [Fig. 3], the priest could then gesture to his left to show both original sin and the Christian's proper response. He could likewise gesture with his right hand toward the crucifix to show that redemption can be found in Jesus Christ, who died for all sinners on the Cross. The visual theology the pulpit presents is reinforced by the structure's composition, in which the priest is led to performatively process through these biblical figures and their actions in order to ascend to the space where he will preach.

The way in which the groups of sculpted figures were brought together in a suggested natural environment was apparently designed to make the viewing public forget that they were looking at a piece of furniture. The pulpit evokes the illusion that congregants are in the same space as the holy figures with whom they are to identify. The pulpit as a whole not only strongly underscores the call for conversion that would have come from the priest giving his sermon, but also would 'speak' by itself at times when it was not in use. There are no accounts of people who were actually converted simply by looking at pulpits like these, but we can be sure that they were meant, by their patrons, to be part of a concerted effort to bring about conversion in the hearts and minds of as many faithful as possible.

### *From allegory to action*

Beginning around the middle of the seventeenth century, churches in the Southern Netherlands, especially those belonging to preaching orders like the Franciscans, Dominicans, Norbertines, Augustinians, Cistercians, and Jesuits, engaged in a competition to build the most spectacular and attractive pulpits, which reached its climax in the first half of the eighteenth century. There are spectacular pulpits in other countries, too, but the diversity of baroque pulpits in Flanders and Brabant is unmatched. More than a thousand of these structures from the period 1600–1800 can still be found in Belgian churches today, all showing varying degrees of expressiveness.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The estimate of more than a thousand is based on the records of the Koninklijk Instituut voor het Kunstpatrimonium in Brussels, which have fortunately been made

Pulpits had long been decorated with relief scenes and figurative ornaments on the corners of the rostrum, but halfway through the seventeenth century, the role of sculpture became much more prominent when it became fashionable to shape the foot of the pulpit with caryatid-like sculptures (usually four). They could be the four evangelists, or the four continents, or four angels. Although this gave pulpits a heavier presence in the church interior, they were still rather indirect in their message. For example, it took something of an intellectual leap to realize that sculptures of an Indian, a black man, a white man, and an Asian were symbolic representations of the four continents, which also represented the ambition of the Catholic Church to spread the faith over the whole world.

Towards the end of the century, though, these allegorical and symbolical figures were often substituted for saints who were portrayed as if they were spreading the word, as in the pulpit from the Dominican convent of Lier. Here, we see St. Thomas Aquinas sitting in a chair, opening his mouth and making a speaking gesture. Henri-François Verbruggen was an important forerunner in this respect. In 1697, he made a pulpit for the Antwerp Augustine church that shows St. Augustine receiving divine inspiration for his writings and sitting on top of a globe that crushes an unbeliever. In both cases, the exact identity of the protagonists might elude some viewers, but it would be perfectly understandable that, in the first case, an important

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available online ([www.kikirpa.be](http://www.kikirpa.be)). The most cited publication on these pulpits is still Fierens P., *Chaires et confessionaux baroques* (Brussels: 1943); Susanne Geese's dissertation (Geese, *Kirchenmöbel*) has not been noticed widely yet. It appeared just too late to be included in the bibliography of Vlieghe H., *Flemish art and architecture 1585-1700* (New Haven - London: 1998), which is a pity because it offers a much more thorough study of the phenomenon than Fierens did. Geese's book focuses on the depiction of nature in three main examples (the pulpits of St. Gudule in Brussels, the cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp and St. Rombout in Mechlin). They are thoughtfully situated by Geese in the context of comparable works in Belgium and the rest of Europe. Geese also offers a tentative explanation for the high density of theatrical pulpits in the Southern Netherlands by referring to the fierce polemic between the so-called 'Jansenists' and 'Anti-Jansenists'. This polemic was going on in the Netherlands and Northern France since 1641, when Cornelius Jansenius's *Augustinus* was published. The polemic reached its peak between ca. 1690 and 1725. Opposing opinions on St. Augustine's principles and irreconcilable points of view about devotional practice that resulted from them split the clergy into two camps. As this struggle involved the devotional practice on which the salvation of the parishioners depended, it was mainly fought from the pulpit. I plan to further investigate this line of thought in my future research by connecting certain pulpits to sermons that were demonstrably given from them.



message was authoritatively brought by someone, and, in the second case, the message was triumphantly delivered and received throughout the world, even at the expense of those who would oppose it.

Pulpit designs pioneered many iconographical approaches to the theme of spreading the Gospel. Some showed the messengers in the process of powerfully evangelizing, like in the two pulpits just discussed. Similar to the St. Norbert pulpit, others emphasized the recipient of the message, who is then converted. Finally, it was also possible to dispense with the saints and show the Gospel itself, as in Mechlin's church of St. Catherine, where one could see the priest standing on the roof of the stable where Jesus is lying in his manger. To top this, the message of the Bible and the theme of preaching were combined by showing Jesus as he taught his followers in first-century Palestine. In the church of St. John, a few blocks away from St. Catherine's, the pulpit shows the Redeemer telling the parable of the Good Shepherd.

In 1699, Verbruggen completed his masterpiece for the Jesuit church in Louvain. It would attract much attention and, with its integrated approach to iconography from bottom to top, set the tone for what would follow. At the base, the pulpit showcases the Expulsion from Paradise in all its drama [Fig. 4]. The rostrum above Adam and Eve consists of a globe covered by a veil carrying the initials of the Virgin, behind which a skeleton personifying death appears to confront Eve immediately after she has committed her first sin. The theatrical entrance of the skeleton is highly reminiscent of Bernini's Tomb of Pope Alexander VII (1671–1678), in which a skeleton emerging from drapery threatens the pope with an hourglass. No doubt, the dramatic concepts of Bernini were of paramount importance for the development of the pulpits in question here, and Verbruggen was one of the artists most consciously using his example.<sup>16</sup>

The program of the Louvain pulpit, beginning with the Fall of Man at floor level, is extended to the top of the canopy. There, we see the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, who together with her Son crushes Satan under foot. The enormous construction, more than seven meters high, testified to the Jesuits' veneration of the Virgin. For those to whom the general message is not clear, the motto on the rostrum

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<sup>16</sup> It is generally assumed that he travelled to Rome around 1680. See *De beeldhouwkunst in de eeuw van Rubens in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden en het Prinsbisdom Luik* (cat. exh. Brussels: 1977) 262.



Fig. 4. Henri-François Verbruggen, *Pulpit with the Expulsion of Adam and Eve* (1699), Brussels, Cathedral of St. Gudule and St. Michael (formerly Louvain, Jesuit church of St. Michael).

explains: 'Ave Maria Mutans Evae Nomen'. The motto communicates that the word with which the Angel Gabriel greets Mary, *Ave*, reversed Eve's name as well as inaugurated the process of redemption from original sin that had resulted from her partaking of the fruit.

*The desired impact of theatrical pulpits*

The success of Verbruggen's approach – replacing (or combining) allegory with action – may be called spectacular, as it was adapted very soon in many churches. Apparently, patrons appreciated the theatrical appeal it brought. There are some contemporary written sources that support this idea. A most remarkable one is the valuation of a pulpit for the church of St. Michael in Ghent, erected at the request of the churchwardens and the clergy of the parish. The commission had been given to the local sculptor Jan Baptist Helderberghe, who had already provided a clay model. The pulpit itself has not been preserved – in fact, we do not know if it was executed at all – but the document gives a vivid image of how it might have looked, and especially how its constituting elements were appraised.

The statues of the base received the most attention – it was to consist of a figure of St. Michael, assisted by two angels, conquering a seven-headed dragon representing the seven cardinal sins. This dragon was esteemed to be the most difficult part to fashion, with its 'seven animal heads, which have to represent very diligently the different kinds of sins, which have to be depicted as hideously as possible, without crossing the borders of the natural'.<sup>17</sup> Further on in the text, construction

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<sup>17</sup> Geese, *Kirchenmöbel* 198–200, appendix nr. 6. Interestingly, Geese discovered this source and graciously published it in full in an appendix, but only mentions the document in a footnote of her text, without going into specifics. The parts of the original text that were paraphrased here read as follows: 'Door eerst beginnende van het onderste stuck der beeldthouwerije des preckstoel: ende ook het swaerste ende moyelykste stuck is den Draeck om redden [...] dat hy seijnen Hoofden heft, die representeren de seven hoofd sonden, de welcke moeten verthoonst worden door seven Dieren hoofden die aldernaerckstelijk die sorten van sonden representeren ende die moeten uyt ghebeelt worden op d'alder afgrijselyckste maniere dat moghelyk is, nochtans niet buyten de trecken vande natuerelijcke. [...] meer moeyelyckheydt, by brynghen als de staende beelden omdat sy roont moeten gesneden worden, soo veel van arnten als van vooren, waer inde meeste conste van elck beelde gheleyghen is als het van alle canten ghesien worden, t'welck een groot verschil is bey een beelt dat maer van vooren ghesien worddt [...] ende de swaerste oorsaecke om dat sy moeten schynen den stoel te draeghen. Dat sy oock moeten stryden teghen den Draeck ten te welcke dat het

difficulties are discussed. Because the figures would be seen from all sides, they were to be cut in the round, which is much harder than making sculptures that are viewed from a single perspective, as the appraiser remarks. In addition, while positioned as if in battle, the figures had to appear as if they were carrying the rostrum and completely camouflage the iron construction that actually supported the structure. Apparently, what we nowadays perceive as the most striking features of these pulpits, namely their illusionism and dramatic power, were the very same characteristics that contemporary patrons appreciated. Furthermore, the emphasis on the frightening depiction of the cardinal sins reminds us of the central message of most sermons.

Apart from wanting to make a powerful impression on the local viewing public, another reason to spend large amounts of money on pulpits might have been the wish to reach a broader audience. It appears that pulpits indeed attracted the attention of people inside and outside the local community and became the object of competition between churches. After Henri-Francois Verbruggen's pulpit with Adam and Eve [Fig. 4] was inaugurated, the Louvain Jesuits reported that the newly revealed colossus was attracting much attention, and that many people had undertaken long journeys just to see this particular pulpit. It would soon become the envy of many, as appears from a manuscript by an Antwerp Cistercian monk, who wrote the history of his abbey around 1769. Proudly, he described the magnificent Paradise pulpit with which Michiel Vervoort had enriched the Cistercian church in 1713. It would have been the most elegant and rich of its kind, the source says, if not for the one that could be found in the church of the Louvain Jesuits.<sup>18</sup>

Not only in the circles of the Catholic clergy themselves, but also in the circles of art lovers, Flemish pulpits had become an object of discussion. Jacobus van der Sanden, in his unpublished eulogy of Antwerp art, extensively praises Verbruggen's pulpit in Louvain and Vervoort's

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constelycke is, dat sy moeten soo ghevast worden, dat sy alle het yserwerck moeten bedercken, daer sy ende den stoel mede vast ghemaect syn'.

<sup>18</sup> Geese, *Kirchenmöbel* 196: 'illius conopeum satis ponderorum non e tholo suspensum est, ut in ceteris solet fieri templis, se dab Angelo tibicie videtur sustineri. Hujusque sedis concionatorie elegantiam quam plurimi supra omnes in Belgio notas extollunt, excepta fortassis illa, que Lovanii spectatur in Aede Reverendorum Patrum Societatis Jesu, ab Henrico Verbrugghen juniore Antverpie sculpta'.

pulpits in Antwerp and Mechlin.<sup>19</sup> For travellers to Mechlin, the St. Norbert pulpit was a must-see, as appears from Descamps's description mentioned earlier, and the anonymous two-volume *Description of Mechlin* (1770), which states that the Leliendael pulpit was 'highly estimated by connoisseurs'.<sup>20</sup> The appreciation by art lovers for these exuberant theatrical ensembles was short-lived though, undoubtedly because of the neoclassical taste that became prevalent in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century. This change was reflected in the way pulpits were produced from then on. Instead of sculptors, furniture-makers became the main suppliers.<sup>21</sup>

But that is not the whole story. The tradition of theatrical pulpits as it had developed in the Southern Netherlands between 1650 and 1750 was too strong to be completely suppressed by an international change in aesthetic taste. Apparently, many a clergyman and churchwarden still appreciated the affective qualities of those pulpits with extensive groups of sculptures underneath and rock, tree, and cloud formations above. First of all, this becomes clear when we look at the prestigious locations where the most praised examples from the churches of the leading religious orders wound up after the shake-up of the Napoleonic era: the Mechlin St. Norbert pulpit by Vervoort [Fig. 1] was transferred to St. Rombout Cathedral in the same city; Verbruggen's pulpit for the Louvain Jesuits [Fig. 4] was placed in the Brussels Cathedral of St. Gudule and St. Michael, whereas the Paradise pulpit of the Antwerp Cistercians is now proudly standing in Antwerp's Cathedral of Our Lady.

More evidence for a continuing appreciation of the free-flowing forms of Verbruggen, Vervoort, and Verhagen is that even in the nineteenth century patrons who really wanted to splurge on a pulpit opted for the sculptural approach; apparently the know-how to execute them was still there. The Mechlin sculptor Jan Frans van Geel (1756–1830), for example, designed and executed the new pulpit for

<sup>19</sup> Jacobus van der Sanden, *Oud Konst-Toneel van Antwerpen*, 3 vols., 1770/1771 (manuscript, Stadsarchief Antwerpen); the relevant passages transcribed in Geese, *Kirchenmöbel* 195–196.

<sup>20</sup> *Provincie, Stad ende District van Mechelen*, 2 vols. (Brussels: J.B. Jorez: 1770) vol. II, 227–228.

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, the pulpits in Linter and Overboelare ([www.kikirpa.be](http://www.kikirpa.be), online photo library).

the church of St. Andrew in Antwerp in 1821 [Fig. 5].<sup>22</sup> The monumental group of sculptures at floor level represents the Calling of Peter and Andrew, who gave up their worldly occupation as fishermen after being instantly converted by Christ when he called to them. Even in these years, the combination of an iconography of conversion with a dramatic and emotional style was considered appropriate for the place in the church from which the Gospel message was spread.

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<sup>22</sup> Melckebeke G.J.J. van, *Levensschets van den beeldhouwer Jan-Frans van Geel* (Antwerpen: 1858) 16–17. Van Geel was also the one who made the necessary changes and additions to the Leliendaal pulpit when it was moved to St. Rombout.



Fig. 5. Jan Frans van Geel, *Pulpit with the Calling of Peter and Andrew* (1821). Antwerp, Church of St. Andrew.

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